

Auburn-Alabama: The Heartbreak, One Year Later

BY THOMAS LAKE

P. 40

NOVEMBER 24, 2014

SI.COM
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If the Colts didn't know the running back's name before, they do now: He gashed them for 199 yards and four TDs.

Sports Illustrated

Jonas Gray ... Because of Course

JONAS GRAY

The Relentless, Anonymous Brilliance of the New England Patriots

BY GREG BISHOP P. 30

+ [SPEAKING OF ANONYMOUS]

*How 'bout AL
Cy Young Award Winner
Corey Kluber*

BY ALBERT CHEN P. 54



The tablet that can replace your laptop

The new Surface Pro 3 has a built-in adjustable Kickstand so you can watch the game from any position. It's thin and light, runs Windows and Office, and even handles your favorite desktop programs like Adobe Photoshop. And you can see all the action on the 12" touchscreen. It also comes with a USB port and optional click-in keyboard. It's a tablet, a laptop and a game changer all in one.





Golf TDI

e-Golf

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Golf GTI

Golf



Das Auto.

BY MOVING SIDE TO SIDE
SHAVING HAS FINALLY
MOVED FORWARD



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PRO FOOTBALL

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The Patriots

New blood and old hands make New England the team to beat—again

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Steve Smith

A survival plan for an undersized, overly confrontational wideout

By Greg Bishop

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

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2013 Iron Bowl

The Kick-Six proved more tragic than magic for some fans in Alabama

By Thomas Lake

PRO BASKETBALL

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The Suns

Phoenix is using three point guards at once. Trendsetting or excessive?

By Lee Jenkins

BASEBALL

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Corey Kluber

An unexpected Cy Young will spell the end of his anonymity. Maybe

By Albert Chen

HOCKEY

58

P.K. Subban

The face of the Canadiens is bold but reckless, brilliant but exasperating. Though he's chasing his first Cup, the league's most demanding fans love him as the successor to the franchise's most hallowed ghosts

By Michael Farber

* DEFENDER OF THE REALM

One of the NHL's top blueliners, Subban holds the key to Montreal's chances of winning a record 25th Stanley Cup.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN HUET
FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

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UCLA freshmen learn their P's and Q's

SI HAS REGIONAL

COVERS THIS WEEK:

DAVID E. KLUTHO/SPORTS
ILLUSTRATED (JONAS GRAY);
JOHN HUET FOR SPORTS
ILLUSTRATED (P.K. SUBBAN)



The FanNation fantasy sports app allows you to select a set of NFL players—a quarterback, a running back, a wide receiver or tight end—each week for the Football Throwdown. Challenge your friends for cash prizes or just for bragging rights. To learn more, go to fannation.SI.com



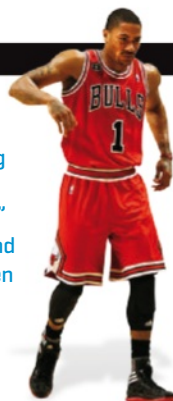
Kobe's Beef

At 1-9 the Lakers are off to the worst 10-game start in the franchise's 66-year history. Things are so bad in L.A. that a 44-point effort by **Kobe Bryant** couldn't stop a 21-point shellacking by the Warriors. His response to criticism that he still takes too many shots? "I'd rather not have to do that, but we can't sit back and let crime happen." Is this a sign that Kobe and Showtime are over? SI senior writers Chris Mannix and Phil Taylor discuss the Lakers' woes on SI.com's latest video talk show, *Give and Go*. The duo also weighs in on the 2-7 Nuggets' skid. Go to SI.com/nba for this and other *Give and Go* segments, and join the discussion on Twitter by using **#mannixmailbag** and following **@ChrisMannixSI** and **@SI_PhilTaylor**



A Thorny Issue

Is **Derrick Rose's** decision not to play because of a left hamstring injury hurting his career? 120 Sports hosts **Ovie Mughelli** and **Rick Strom** disagree. "Derrick's career is not to run for governor," says Mughelli. "He doesn't need fan votes to play. His career is on the court, and he'll get back on it when the time is right." Counters Strom, "Rose's doctor even told him [that in order to] finish his rehab, he had to go out and play. What did he do? Sit out. Players without passion are rarely worth watching." For more of Mughelli and Strom's *Point/Counterpoint*, plus 24-hour access to video highlights and analysis, go to 120sports.com



SI.COM'S TOP 10

- 1 **Ryan Anderson: Love, Loss and Survival**
- 2 **Max Lenox: A Leader Of Character**



- 3 **The NBA's Highest Paid** ▲
For a roundup of last week's 10 most popular stories on SI.com, including a look at the NBA's highest-paid players, go to SI.com/topstories. The Nets' **Joe Johnson**, who will earn \$23,180,790 this season, ranks third behind Kobe Bryant and Amar'e Stoudemire.

- 4 **AFL-NFL: A Lasting Rivalry**
- 5 **Taking the Pledge**
- 6 **Minus One McDermott**
- 7 **Wayne Simmonds's Mission**
- 8 **High Supply, Low Demand**
- 9 **The Other Kids On the Block**
- 10 **Underdogs: Top of the World**

SI PRO-FILES

As successful as some athletes are on the field, some find even more success after they retire. To see videos of athletes turned business leaders, go to SI.com/pro-files, a series from the editors of *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED* and *FORTUNE*.



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Leading
Off

+

1
of
3

THREE DAYS IN WISCONSIN

Elisha Cooper painted images and wrote about
a trio of football games last weekend



HIGH SCHOOL

Waunakee Vs. Waukesha West

KETTLE MORAINES HIGH

■ With the temperature around 18° last Friday night, the Waunakee High

Warriors battled the Waukesha West Wolverines in a Division 2 state semifinal game. The cheerleaders, in earmuffs, looked miserable, but the cold didn't bother Warriors quarterback Troy Laufenberg (21), who rushed for 210 yards and threw a touchdown with 21.3 seconds left to bring his team within one point, 21-20.

Everyone from the fans draped in blankets to the players huddled on the sidelines expected Laufenberg to keep the ball as Waunakee went for two. The Warriors instead ran a reverse, with senior wideout Alex Helt attempting a throw that was knocked down on the goal line. Laufenberg cried through his face mask as the Warriors walked off the field. The Waukesha players stuck around and hugged their girlfriends: They were going to Camp Randall for the state championship game.







Leading
Off

+

2
of
3



COLLEGE

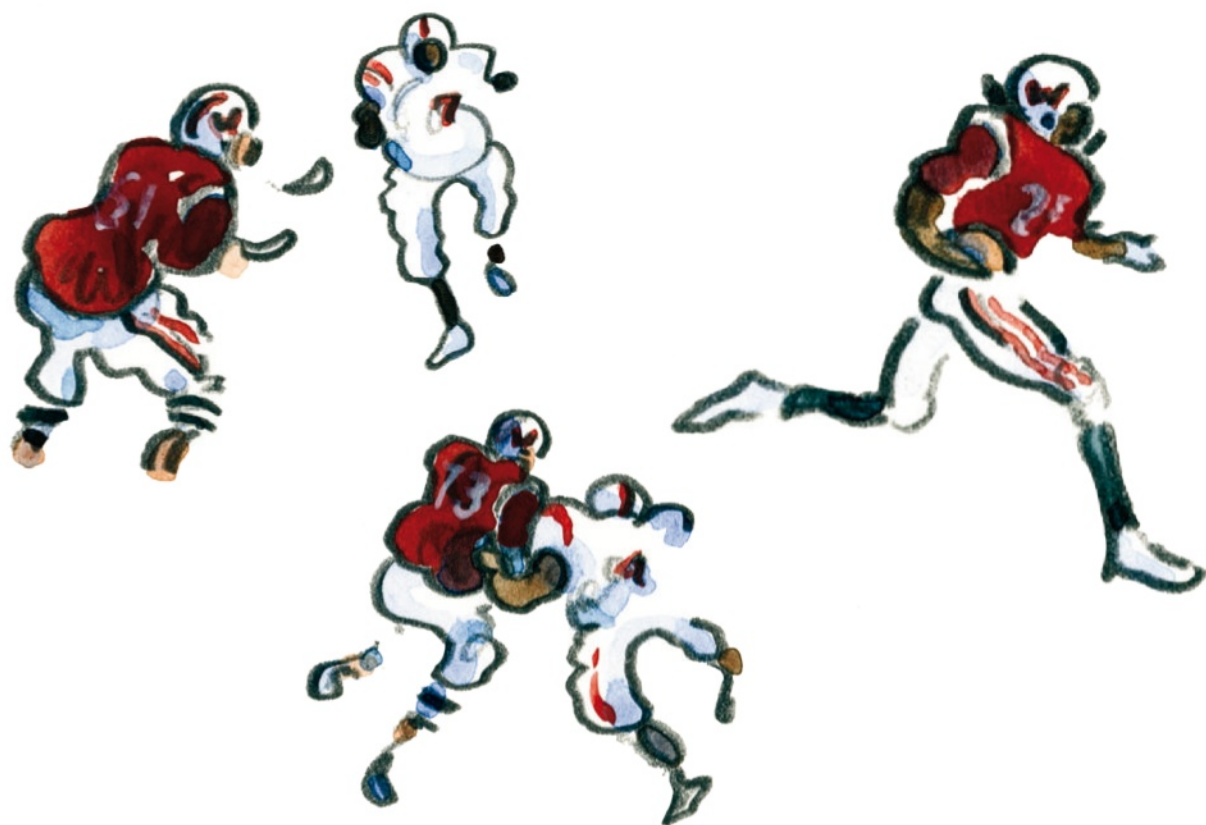
Wisconsin Vs. Nebraska

CAMP RANDALL,
MADISON

■ Last Saturday
afternoon the
pregame buzz
in Madison was
mostly about

pulled pork, cheddar brats, cheese
curds and sausage. But after the
59-24 defeat of the Cornhuskers,
Wisconsin's Melvin Gordon (25) had
become the talk of the nation. The
6' 1" junior running back needed just
25 carries to set a new FBS single-
game rushing record, with 408 yards.
The Badgers' line opened holes so wide
that a fat man selling cheese curds
could walk through them, allowing
Gordon to average 16.3 yards per
carry, score four touchdowns and
not even play in the fourth quarter.
As snow started to fall, the line kept
playing, lumbering around the field and
looking for things to flatten.







Leading
Off



3
of
3



PRO

Packers vs. Eagles

LAMBEAU FIELD,
GREEN BAY

■ Lambeau Field sits in a neighborhood of small houses and gray woods, not far from the

parking lot of a Cabela's Sporting Goods store, which may well be the source of the hunting gear some fans wear to the game. Clad in a blue-and-yellow throwback uniform, Green Bay quarterback Aaron Rodgers (12) resembled a guy playing catch in a field with friends as he threw ball after ball to wideouts Randall Cobb (18) and Jordy Nelson in a 53-20 dismantling of the Eagles.

In the locker room after the game, the Packers whooped in the showers. They dressed slowly as reporters clustered around them. Rodgers grabbed a snack as he put on his jacket, and headed out into the Wisconsin night.



INBOX

FOR NOV. 10, 2014

As a retired Marine who is heterosexual and who was raised in South Carolina, I am sure it might appear to some that I would be the type of man who would be turned off by **Max Lenox's** upbringing, in which he was raised by two gay fathers (*Do Ask, Do Tell*). Instead, I was absolutely blown away by his story. God bless Max and those great men who adopted him.

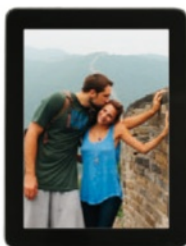
Terence D'Alesandro, San Jose



Just when I was starting to despair about the intolerance and meanness in our world, along comes this inspiring story about **Max** and his dads. Sports, and the stories about those who play them, often remind us of the best of humanity.

Dick Tomeo, South Thomaston, Maine

FOR NOV. 17, 2014



I just finished reading your story (*Love, Loss and Survival*) on Pelicans forward **Ryan Anderson** and the loss of his girlfriend, **Gia**

Allemand to suicide, and I cried. I cried because I too am a survivor of suicide, as my brother took his life. Then I read Steve Rushin's column about Dante Chiappetta and what the Yale football team has done for him and I cried again, this time tears of thankfulness and joy.

Bob Fuller, Vermillion, S.D.



I was first drawn to your article on **Ryan Anderson** because he starred at Cal, my alma mater. While reading it, I was totally unnerved by his story. I have lost four friends to suicide over the years, and you could have used the same "I never saw a sign" line that is mentioned about all of them. Hats off to Ryan for stepping forward and becoming a spokesperson for suicide awareness.

Rich Fong, Sebastopol, Calif.



COVER

I was excited to see the headline on your college basketball preview cover, PLUS, ALL 351 TEAMS RANKED, hoping to see my alma mater, Dartmouth. To my surprise, the rankings were not in the magazine but only online. It would be nice if your headlines were less misleading in the future.

Jeremy Gwiazda
Somerville, Mass.

PAGE 18

SCORECARD



Your Pro-Files feature

is quickly becoming my favorite section of the magazine. I loved reading about **David Eckstein** and his post-MLB career. Glad to see that he and his wife, Ashley, are excelling in their new endeavor.

Jeffrey S. Ball
Carmel, Ind.

PAGE 72

WOMEN'S PREVIEW



Where's the respect for the women's game? You rank the top 16 men's teams and include two feature articles, while only ranking the top 5 women's teams with no features.

Lynn Klyde-Silverstein
Arvada, Colo.

CONTACT
SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

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Edited by / JIM GORANT / TED KEITH / RICHARD O'BRIEN / REBECCA SHORE

+ Scorecard

Fitting Finish

After 14 years pursuing the Cup, Kevin Harvick won his first title, surviving a grueling new Chase format that gave NASCAR a much-needed jolt

BY ANDREW LAWRENCE



AT THE MANDATORY

drivers' meeting two hours before last Sunday's Ford EcoBoost 400, the final race of the 2014 Sprint Cup season, NASCAR president Mike Helton sounded a note of caution. Looking out at the 43 drivers scattered among the scores of corporate bigwigs and sponsor reps gathered under a vast white canopy in the garage area of Homestead-Miami Speedway, a stern-looking Helton said, "It's very

important that today's result unfolds naturally."

Helton was warning against any rough-and-tumble or overt team collusion on the track, but he might just as well have been speaking about the sport's new championship format. He needn't have worried. Sunday's race delivered clean action and, more to the point, a dramatic and clear-cut climax to the season and an indisputable champion—Kevin Harvick.

It was an outcome few anticipated when NASCAR announced its revamped

playoff system before the season. Stock car fans went from rolling their eyes at the news of yet another tweak to the Chase for the Cup—the fourth since the 10-race "postseason" was introduced in 2004—to scratching their heads over the new format.

The newest version of the Chase seemed little more than a clumsy attempt to borrow from the championships in other sports. There was a March Madness-style bracket to winnow a field of 16 contenders down to a

final four; there were three elimination races meant to evoke the Game 7 scenarios of the major leagues; and there was Sunday's winner-take-all finale, a speedway Super Bowl.

NASCAR's cut-and-paste job wound up producing something quite genuine, though, and surprising: emotion. That's not easily done in a sport in which the stars are hidden within shaded helmets, sponsor-emblazoned fire suits and 3,300-pound cars—and, off the track, stay relentlessly on script.

That wasn't always the case, of course. NASCAR's breakout from regional pastime to national entertainment can be traced to Bobby Allison's whaling on Cale Yarborough after the 1979 Daytona 500. Over the years, though, NASCAR—eager to attract mainstream sponsors and mass appeal—clamped down on driver misconduct.

But, slowly, the suits are attempting to point the sport back toward its more colorful roots. And, once the new Chase went into effect, offering a familiar structure for drama—win, or go home—it got real and fast.

Harvick, an unflappable Sprint Cup veteran, would later confess that, as the Chase unfolded, the new urgency to survive and advance (with four drivers eliminated from contention after the third, sixth and ninth races) had turned him into a nauseous insomniac. Midway through the second round, the normally mild-mannered Matt Kenseth jumped Brad Keselowski in the garage area after the Oct. 11 race at Charlotte Motor Speedway. And then, of course, in round three, Jeff Gordon emerged with a bloody lip, fresh from his own tussle with Keselowski. "I think for me, it's just the most intense situation I've been in in my racing career," Harvick said of the Chase after prevailing on Homestead's 1.5-mile oval. "Every week every situation matters so much, and you just don't know if that's going to be the end."

That desperation—and the on-the-track and off-

the-track fireworks it produced—had people flocking to follow the action. After experiencing steady-to-declining attendance and TV ratings for most of the season, NASCAR finished on an upswing in the wake of Kenseth's combative moment. Credit it for not standing in the way of a good show. "We don't want to get ourselves in a situation where no one can express themselves," NASCAR chairman Brian France explained two days before the final. "We expect them to do that in a way that is civil, but we also know that there are going to be some moments where the emotions will get the best of anybody."

That didn't happen on Sunday. Even with the stakes so high—whoever finished first among the quartet of Harvick, Joey Logano, Denny Hamlin and Ryan Newman would win the title—all four finalists rose to the occasion.

Even Newman, who had remained in contention despite not winning a race all year, stepped up. Steadily, he worked his way from a 21st-place start into a battle with his three rivals as all ran in the top six. While his Chevy would prove faster than it had been all season, it wasn't quick enough to catch Harvick—who led 54 laps and launched his Chevy through a restart with three laps to go to take his third checkered flag of the Chase, and the first Cup title of his 14-year career.

It was a popular and eminently deserved victory—for both the new champion and his sport. □

+ GO FIGURE

408 ➔

Rushing yards by Wisconsin junior running back **Melvin Gordon** last Saturday, the highest single-game total in FBS history. Gordon broke the record held by LaDainian Tomlinson, who rushed for 406 yards for TCU on Nov. 20, 1999. Gordon needed only 25 carries to set the mark and didn't play in the fourth quarter of the Badgers' 59-24 win over Nebraska.



134 / Combined points by the **ROCKETS** and the **THUNDER** in Houston's 69-65 win on Sunday. It's the fewest points the Rockets have scored in a win in their 48-year history and the fewest combined points in an NBA game since 2005.



139 / Points scored by the **PELICANS** last Friday against the **TIMBERWOLVES**, the most in team history and the most in the NBA this season. New Orleans beat Minnesota by 48 points, the largest margin of victory in franchise history.



16,754

Harness racing wins for **Dave Palone**—and for Heinz Wewering—through Sunday. Palone, 52, broke the record of the 64-year-old Wewering last Friday aboard Missy Tap Tina at the Meadows Racetrack & Casino in Pennsylvania, but Wewering tied him the next day in Germany.

164

APPROXIMATE DISTANCE, IN FEET, FROM WEMBLEY STADIUM TO THE HOTEL BEING USED BY THE SLOVENIAN NATIONAL SOCCER TEAM. THEY WANTED TO WALK, BUT UEFA ORDERED THEM TO TAKE A BUS BEFORE THEIR MATCH AGAINST ENGLAND TO ENSURE THEY WOULDN'T BE LATE. SLOVENIA LOST 3-1.



SoCal Sweep

Mike Trout and Clayton Kershaw are the best of their generation

THIS YEAR'S BBWAA awards built up to a coronation. Mets pitcher Jacob deGrom and White Sox first baseman Jose Abreu were Rookies of the Year; the Nationals' Matt Williams and the Orioles' Buck Showalter were Managers of the Year; and Corey Kluber (*page 54*) surprised many by edging Felix Hernandez for the AL Cy Young.

There was no suspense about the NL Cy Young, though: It went to Dodgers ace Clayton Kershaw, who was so dominant—21–3 with a 1.77 ERA and 239 strikeouts in 198½ innings—that the next day he took home the NL MVP too. Meanwhile, the Angels' Mike Trout had the worst of his three full major league seasons, and he still won the AL MVP unanimously, after hitting .287/.377/.561 with 36 homers and 111 RBIs.

TROUT



LED THE LEAGUE IN RUNS IN EACH OF HIS FIRST THREE SEASONS

First player in history to accomplish that

NINTH AL PLAYER TO BE NAMED ROOKIE OF THE YEAR AND MVP

LED THE LEAGUE IN WAR FOR THE THIRD STRAIGHT YEAR

The first unanimous MVP winner since Ken Griffey Jr., in 1997, and the 10th ever in the AL

At 23, the fifth-youngest MVP in history and the youngest since Cal Ripken Jr. in 1983. (Vide Blue, Johnny Bench and Stan Musial are the others.)

KERSHAW



HAD THE LOWEST ERA IN BASEBALL FOR THE FOURTH STRAIGHT SEASON

No other pitcher has ever managed that

YOUNGEST THREE-TIME CY YOUNG WINNER

THE FIRST NL PITCHER TO WIN MVP SINCE BOB GIBSON IN '68

Had a higher on-base percentage as a batter (.235) than opposing hitters had against him (.231)

The only other pitchers who've won three or more Cy Youngs: Sandy Koufax, Tom Seaver, Steve Carlton, Jim Palmer, Roger Clemens, Greg Maddux, Randy Johnson and Pedro Martinez.



OLYMPIC BUSTS

On Nov. 11 the International Ski Federation banned Vanessa-Mae, the famous English violinist of Thai descent, for allegedly qualifying for Sochi by competing in a fixed race. She's not the first Olympian who was out of her depth. A brief history, ranked by how far behind the winner each finished.

Hamadou (the Otter) Issaka Niger, London 2012 → Learned to row three months before the Games.
BEHIND GOLD: 128%

Vanessa- (the Violinist) Mae Thailand, Sochi 2014 → Allegedly faked race results to qualify for the giant slalom.
BEHIND GOLD: 132%

Philip (Cool Runnings) Boit Kenya, Nagano 1998 → Nike project to build an African cross-country skier.
BEHIND GOLD: 173%

Eric (Eel) Moussambani Equatorial Guinea, Sydney 2000 → Trained for only eight months before the games—in a hotel pool.
BEHIND GOLD: 233%

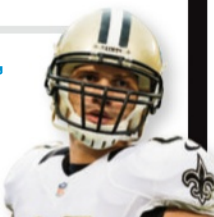
Eddie (the Eagle) Edwards Great Britain, Calgary 1988 → Qualified because he was the only jumper from GB.
BEHIND GOLD: 390%

Gary (the Banker) di Silvestri and Angelica (the Banker's wife) di Silvestri Dominica, Sochi 2014 → Rumored to have bought citizenship to get into cross-country event.
BEHIND GOLD: DNF AND DNS

THEY SAID IT

"That'll probably be my last one after I got groped up."

JIMMY GRAHAM Saints tight end, on why he'll no longer jump into the Superdome stands to celebrate a TD after a fan got too friendly when he scored against the Niners on Nov. 9.



Sports Illustrated
SPORTSMAN
OF THE YEAR

WHO WILL BE
THE ONE IN
2014?

*“I understand.
I was chosen
for this. It’s my
gift. It’s my
responsibility.”*

SPORTS ILLUSTRATED, DECEMBER 10, 2012

LeBron James | 2012 Sportsman of the Year

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#SIsportsman

Where's Bieber?

Even though he showed up at the Steelers' Bible study before the team's Nov. 9 loss to the Jets, Justin Bieber is no jinx. He's supported lots of winners, both in the stands and by wearing the logos of his favorite teams du jour. In fact, as a fan, the Biebs is all over the map.

A few hints below. . .



See if you can find the cities Bieber has turned up in over the last few years.



SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

Jose Canseco says his **surgically reattached left middle finger fell off** while he was participating in a poker tournament.



BREAKOUT PERFORMER

HOT

Giancarlo Stanton

Signs a reported 13-year, \$325 million deal with the Marlins. What's that, about \$1 million per season-ticket holder?

Zach Hodskins

The one-handed walk-on shooting guard played in Florida's 68-45 win over William & Mary, confirming what's long been suspected of early-season CBB matchups.

Christmas Jerseys

The NBA will use first names only on the back. So we'll see LeBron and Carmelo instead of James and Anthony.

Johnny Manziel

Says Tiger Woods denied him an autograph 11 years ago. Johnny Football got Heismaned by a golfer?

Florida State

Two Noles let off easy after fleeing an accident scene. They're supposed to hit and run and avoid penalties on the field.

NOT



NBA

+

Parting Shot

I'm retiring from what I hope is a changed league with an evolving culture

BY JASON COLLINS



IT HAS BEEN

18 exhilarating months since

I came out in **SPORTS ILLUSTRATED** as the first openly gay man in one of the four major professional team sports. And it has been nine months since I signed with the Nets and became the first openly gay male athlete to appear in a game in one of those leagues. It feels wonderful to have been part of these milestones for sports and for gay rights, and to have been embraced by the public, the coaches, the players, the league and history.

On Wednesday at the Barclays Center, I plan to announce my retirement as an NBA player. The day will

be especially meaningful for me because the Nets will be playing the Bucks, who are coached by Jason Kidd, my former teammate and my coach in Brooklyn. It was Jason who cheered my decision to come out by posting on Twitter: "Jason's sexuality doesn't change the fact that he is a great friend and was a great teammate."

Considering all the speculation about problems I might face within the locker room, Jason's support was significant. It had been argued that no team would want to take on a player who was likely to attract a media circus from the outset and whose sexuality would be a distraction. I'm happy to have helped put those



canards to rest. The much-ballyhooed media blitz to cover me unscrambled so quickly that a flack jokingly nicknamed me Mr. Irrelevant.

Among the memories I will cherish most are the warm applause I received in Los Angeles when I took the court in my Nets debut, and the standing ovation I got at my first home game in Brooklyn. It shows how far we've come. The most poignant moment came at my third game, in Denver, where I met the family of Matthew Shepard, a gay college student beaten to death in a 1998 hate crime

on the outskirts of Laramie, Wyo. For the past two years I have worn number 98 on my jersey to honor his memory. I was humbled to learn that number 98 jerseys became the top seller at NBAStore.com. Proceeds from sales, and from auctioned jerseys I wore in games, were donated to two gay-rights charities.

There are still no publicly gay players in the NFL, NHL or major league baseball. Believe me: They exist. Every pro sport has them. I know some of them personally. When we get to the point where a gay pro athlete is no longer forced to live in fear that he'll be shunned by teammates or outed by tabloids, when we get to the point where he plays while his significant other waits in the family room, when we get to the point where he's not compelled to hide his true self and is able to live an authentic life, then coming out won't be such a big deal. But we're not there yet. □

KATHY KWONCEK/AP (COLLINS)

MMMMMVPs

Two MVPs are better than one. So we're excited to welcome Clayton Kershaw to the SUBWAY® lineup, where he joins fellow MVP Mike Trout. While Mike powers his training routine with the **Sweet Onion Chicken Teriyaki**, Clayton's last stop before he pitches is at SUBWAY® for a **Turkey and Swiss**.

CLAYTON KERSHAW

POSITION: PITCHER

THROWS: LEFT BATS: LEFT

HEIGHT: 6 FT 3 IN (1.91 M)

WEIGHT: 225 LB (102 KG)

BIRTHDATE: 3/19/1988

HOMETOWN: DALLAS, TX

4 TIME ALL-STAR

MIKE TROUT

POSITION: OUTFIELDER

THROWS: RIGHT BATS: RIGHT

HEIGHT: 6 FT 1 IN (1.85 M)

WEIGHT: 225 LB (102 KG)

BIRTHDATE: 8/7/1991

HOMETOWN: MILLVILLE, NJ

ALL-STAR / ROOKIE OF THE YEAR



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UPDATE

(Sports) Dog of the Year

■ **Jonny Justice**, a 45-pound, Staffordshire bull terrier, one of 66 canines rescued from Jets quarterback Michael Vick's notorious Bad Newz Kennels in Smithville, Va., in 2007 (SI, Dec. 29, 2008), has come a long way from the nightmarish conditions he endured as a puppy. After Vick and others were convicted on federal charges of trafficking and sponsoring fighting dogs, Jonny won a Most Beautiful Dog in the Country contest in 2012, had a Gund plush toy created in his likeness and last week was recognized for his work as a therapy dog with a new award: ASPCA Dog of the Year.

Jonny, now about eight years old, lives in San Francisco with Cris Cohen and Jennifer Long, longtime pit bull rescue volunteers, who quickly recognized his way with children and had him certified as a therapy dog within a year of taking him in. Jonny has participated in literacy programs, where children practiced their language skills by reading aloud to him, and now brings joy to terminally ill children and their families with his repertoire of 30 tricks. "Anything is possible," says Cohen. —A.F.



Cedric Battle | *Wichita Falls, Texas* | *Football*

Cedric, a senior running back at Hirschi High, rushed for 531 yards and seven touchdowns on 23 carries in a 76–42 win over Burkburnett High to clinch a spot in the 4A playoffs. His single-game rushing performance ranks fifth on the Texas alltime list. Cedric finished the season with 2,699 yards [11.6 per carry] and 30 touchdowns.



Tess Fisher | *Vineland, N.J.* | *Tennis*

Tess, a Vineland High freshman, set a New Jersey single-season record for No. 1 singles players with 40 victories; she was unbeaten until falling 6–0, 6–1 to Rumson–Fair Haven High senior Kate Fahey in a state semifinal. Three days later Tess beat Grace Kim of Moorestown Friends 6–1, 6–3 to win the South Jersey Interscholastic Championships.



Max Sample | *Santa Cruz, Calif.* | *Water Polo*

Max, a senior righthanded attacker at Soquel High, scored eight goals and had six steals in a 17–11 win over Carmel High that clinched the Monterey Bay League championship, the Knights' 20th straight league title. He has a league-high 65 steals and 62 assists, and is third in goals with 128. Max was named a USA Water Polo Academic All-America in September.

Faces in the Crowd

→ | Edited By **ALEXANDRA FENWICK**



Samantha Ortega | *Saugus, Calif.* | *Cross-country*

Samantha, a senior at Saugus High, won her third straight Foothill League title, finishing the three-mile course in 17:13.82 to lead the Centurions to the championship. In September she won the 5K Roy Griak Invitational in St. Paul [18:13.80]. Last year Samantha was third in the state meet and finished 15th at the Foot Locker nationals.



Gavin Yingling | *Salisbury, Md.* | *Soccer*

Yingling, a sophomore forward at Division III U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, scored golden goals in back-to-back double-overtime victories against Drew [2–1] and Scranton [2–1]. He led the Landmark Conference in scoring with 16 points [seven goals, two assists] and was named the league's offensive player of the year.



Chelsea Laden | *Lakeville, Minn.* | *Ice Hockey*

Laden, a senior goaltender at Quinnipiac, had seven saves in a 3–0 victory over Cornell, earning her fifth of six shutouts in nine starts this season. With just three goals allowed through Sunday, she had the best save percentage [.970] and goals-against average [0.33] among Division I goalies who have started at least twice.

Nominate Now ▼

To submit a candidate for Faces in the Crowd, go to SI.com/faces. For more on outstanding amateur athletes, follow @SI_Faces on Twitter.

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Just My Type

→ Interview by **DAN PATRICK**

DAN PATRICK: *How much was the tab when you paid for drinks for media members during your introductory press conference at the Cubby Bear?*

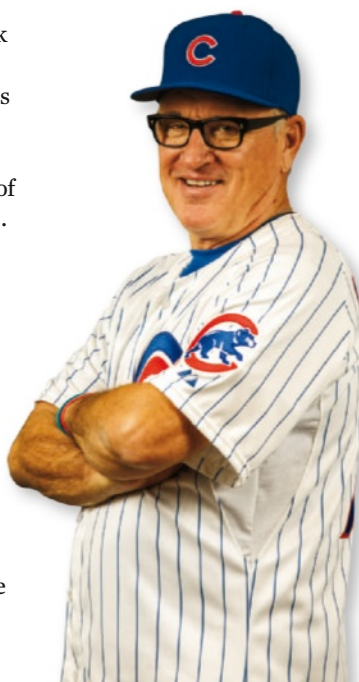
JOE MADDON: Nothing. It was horrible. The media folks did not want to drink during the day. My plan is to pick a game after a Cubs win, head over there and do it for the fans one day. I'm gonna try to pick one of the lower-attendance days.

DP: *How tough was the decision to leave Tampa?*

JM: It was not easy. I had no idea this was even on the horizon. I'm just driving my RV back from Pennsylvania, and all of a sudden [then Rays GM] Andrew Friedman leaves and I'm shown this two-week window of opportunity to try to carve out my future. It was not something I had thought about a whole lot. I had to process a lot of stuff quickly. If you want to do that, get in an RV and drive across the country because you have plenty of time to think.

DP: *How surprised are you that the Rays want to look into tampering charges?*

JM: I was surprised. It was really unfortunate. I was totally oblivious until this popped up. I had no plans [to leave]. I had already been talking



JOE MADDON

DRIVING FORCE

At 60, the skipper is steering a new club, one with a long, long history of failure. Will he be buying a round for the patient fans of Chicago's North Side?

to Andrew about next year. I have all my Rays notes regarding next year written in my iPad. All of a sudden this thing just happened. It's unfortunate that it's turned into that.

DP: *How do you manage expectations in Chicago?*

JM: I don't think it should be any different than anywhere else. I'm going to preach a lot about staying in the present tense. Patience. I know that people have been patient for over a century. I understand how difficult that may be. But it's about how you approach the day.

DP: *How sensitive are you to criticism?*

JM: Not [very]. Everybody has a right to their opinion. I know I'm going to be heavily criticized when things don't go well. I understand the entertainment component of what we do. I try to avoid reading a lot or watching a lot of TV. Both good and bad. I don't want to hear how great I am. If you want to tell me how bad I am, it doesn't bother me. I'm sure the thickness of my skin is going to be tested this season at some point.

DP: *How attractive is the historical upside?*

JM: Highly attractive. The Rays had a lot of futility prior to 2006, kind of a shortened version of what the Cubs have gone through. I'm into that.

DP: *Are you going to take the RV to spring training?*

JM: It's already there. □

Guest Shots Say What?



Baylor fans have griped about

the playoff selection committee's ranking the Bears seventh, but coach **Art Briles** won't take the bait. "I have faith in the system," Briles told me. "Is that naive? When the smoke is all cleared, we'll see [how it shakes out]." ... I asked the Knicks'

Amar'e Stoudemire,

producer of the movie



Beyond

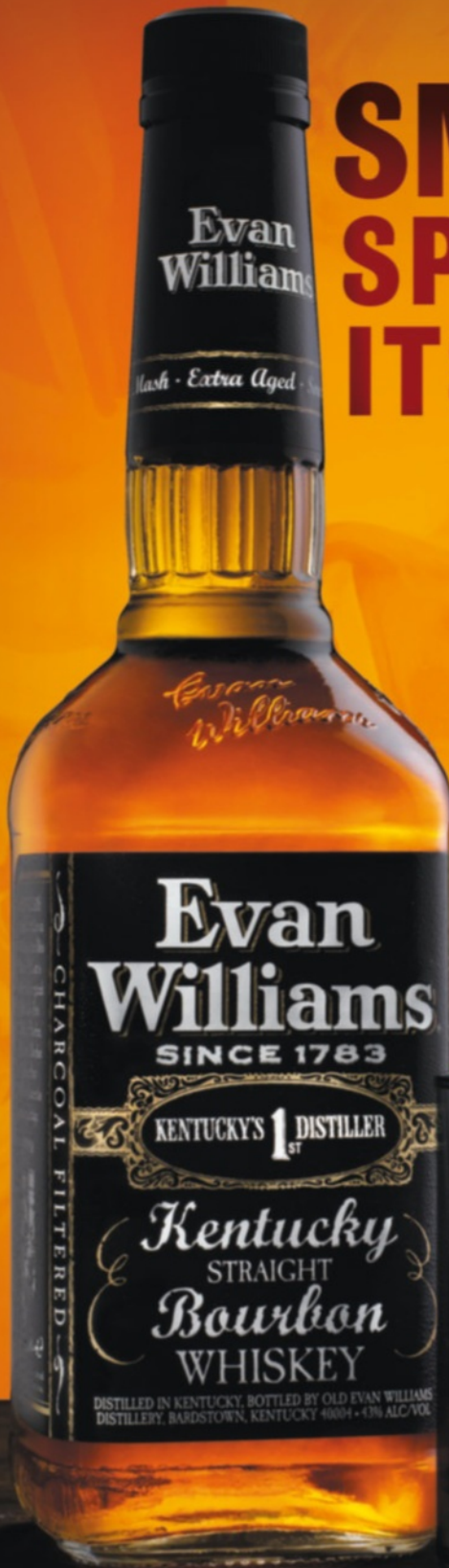
the Lights, why he wants to be behind the camera instead of in front of it as the next athlete turned action hero. "First, you don't see too many black superheroes," Stoudemire said. "Second, you don't see any 6' 10" superheroes." ...



At 75, ESPN's **Dick Vitale**

is looking ahead. "I want to be the first guy in the history of broadcasting to do a game at 100," Vitale said. "My final game? Kentucky and Duke. Krzyzewski and Calipari."

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The Case for ...

Madison Bumgarner

BY HANK HERSCH

For the next two weeks, The Case for ... will feature a Sportsman of the Year candidate. Find more nominees at SI.com/sportsman



HE KEPT

RETURNING to the mound, and

why not? In postseason history, had any pitcher been as effective for so long a stretch? The Giants' Madison Bumgarner had surrendered all of six earned runs in six starts, throwing no fewer than seven innings each time; with the World Series tied at two games apiece, he had shut out the Royals on four hits. Now manager Bruce Bochy was asking his 25-year-old lefthander to hold a 3–2 lead

in Game 7 in Kansas City. No reliever had ever earned a five-inning save in the playoffs—let alone one who had thrown 117 pitches in a start three days earlier.

His left arm swinging back wide from his 6' 5", 235-pound body, then whipping toward the plate, Bumgarner delivered searing four-seam fastballs, sprinkled with cutters, curves and changeups. He blanked the Royals in the fifth. And the sixth. And the seventh. And the eighth. With two outs

It was a stretch of brilliance not seen in the Series since Koufax: 21 innings, nine hits, one run, 17 strikeouts.

in the ninth he gave up his second hit when Alex Gordon lined a single that got by centerfielder Gregor Blanco, allowing Gordon to reach third.

San Francisco's closer, Santiago Casilla, was ready in the bullpen; the righty had yet to give up a run in the postseason. Yet with righthanded-hitting Salvador Perez at the plate, Bumgarner remained on the mound, his demeanor, in the words of GM Brian Sabean, "like glass." Six high heaters later—on Bumgarner's 68th pitch of the night—Perez popped to third, and the Giants popped the champagne on their third championship in five seasons.

Durability, dependability, unflappability—Bumgarner exhibited all of those traits in the 2014 playoffs. But the word often applied to pitchers is the one that sticks to him like resin: *command*. In start after start Bumgarner commanded his fastball, the plate, his emotions, the moment. He began the playoffs with a four-hit shutout of the Pirates in the National League wild-card game, then ended it with a stretch of brilliance not seen in the Series since Koufax: 21 innings, nine hits, one run, one walk, 17 strikeouts, two wins and one outlandish save. For his total command of October, Bumgarner should be SI's Sportsman of the Year.

Consider: Clayton Kershaw of the Dodgers won the Cy Young and MVP

awards—a double that hadn't been achieved in the NL since Bob Gibson in 1968. Yet it was another lefty from the NL West who claimed 2014 for posterity. Bumgarner was hardly an underachiever in the regular season: He went 18–10 with a 2.98 ERA and a 1.090 WHIP. Where he was at his best, though, was when it mattered most: No pitcher has done more to carry a team to a title.

Jake Peavy, Tim Hudson and Ryan Vogelsong, San Francisco's other three starters in the playoffs, were a combined 24–39 during 2014; in October they went 1–3 with a 5.47 ERA in 49⅓ innings. Over his 52⅓ innings—the most ever thrown in a single postseason—Bumgarner was 4–1 with a 1.03 ERA, third best in postseason history (minimum 30 innings). He dropped his career ERA in the World Series to an unprecedented 0.25 (minimum 20 innings). "He is so calm that it leaks into you," said Giants outfielder Hunter Pence, "so confident that it leaks into us."

Bumgarner was the fifth starter on the Giants' 2010 title team; on the '12 champs he was No. 2 in the rotation. This year he was their ace in spades. "I wasn't thinking about innings or pitch count," Bumgarner said after Game 7. "I was just thinking about getting outs, getting outs until I couldn't get them anymore." Then he—and the Royals—were done. □

A photograph taken from the driver's perspective inside a Toyota Corolla. The car's interior, including the steering wheel with the Toyota logo, the dashboard, and the center console, is visible. The background, seen through the windshield and side windows, is a vibrant, colorful scene of people celebrating with colored powder. A woman with long red hair and a man are visible, both wearing sunglasses and having colorful powder on their faces and clothes. The overall atmosphere is festive and energetic.

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Katie Nolan

The Fox Sports funnywoman on bartending, her rapid rise to fame, Regis and “tweeter,” and one-upping Madison Bumgarner

BY JACK DICKEY

Photograph by
TAYLOR BALLANTYNE FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED



Stop us if you've heard this one before: A twentysomething Boston-based bartender of Italian and Irish heritage develops a cult following while riffing on sports and pop culture from some little-known corner of the Internet, then gets snapped up by a major sports media conglomerate for an unusual role. But this isn't 2001, and Katie Nolan's voice is an octave or two higher than Bill Simmons's. In No Filter, her daily video series for foxsports.com, she's saltier and saucier than cable sports' usual fare. And the show's D.I.Y. aesthetic—she works from a small studio, with two producers—would hardly fly on TV either. On a recent Wednesday we caught up with the 27-year-old Framingham, Mass., native at a bar near New York City's Union Square.

What do you usually tell people you do?

I don't know. I make funny videos. I hate saying I'm a comedian, because then people stick their finger in your face and demand you tell a joke. But the other thing people call me is “a YouTube sensation,” which is even worse.

How'd you get started?

I was bartending in Boston five, six nights a week, living in my grandmother's condo. By the way, I'm a really

good bartender—that's the only skill I can confidently say I have. At the time I was really into *Barstool* [an aggressively impolitic Boston-centric sports and lifestyle site], and I thought I was good enough to write for it. So I started my own blog, called Bitches Can't Hang, with my takes on pop culture and the news. It was so stupid. Have I mentioned it was so stupid? But somehow the blog Guyism found me and wanted to publish my posts.



And how'd you get into video?

Guyism wanted a daily video series. They told me they were planning on hiring a girl, and then hiring someone to write all her jokes. Then they figured it would be easier just to get me, so they offered me \$750 a month to do it, which turned into an offer to move to New York and do it full-time for \$30,000 a year. So I moved to Hoboken [N.J.] with two girls I found on Craigslist. Two or three months into that, one of my bosses came to me and said Fox wanted me for their new 24-hour sports channel, and that if I went, the company that owned Guyism would get money. It was like a dowry. *Oh, you'll give us a cow, and we'll give you Katie.*

Do you know how Fox found out about you?

I have no idea. My YouTube videos weren't even getting that many views. Maybe they thought, Oh, she'll be cheap! Four different people at Fox have come up to me and said, You know, I'm the one who found you. And I think, Uh-huh, yeah, I've heard that. But you have to just smile and scream, "Oh, thank you! I owe you my life!"

How'd your start go at Fox?

They flew me out to L.A. for an audition, which I bombed. I had never read off a teleprompter, and I didn't know I needed glasses. They told me I bombed it too. But they still wanted me. I had another screen test that went a little better. And

then they told me they wanted to put me on a show with Regis Philbin. [*Crowd Goes Wild*, which ran from August 2013 until it was canceled last May.] I was like, What the f---? He's still doing TV? I Googled him and found out he was 82. My grandmother is 82, and some days she doesn't even put her teeth in.

What's Regis like?

He's exactly the person you see on TV. He came into my dressing room and said, "This tweeter you're always talking about, what is it?" I told him it was on the Internet. He said, "Oh, they have it on there? How long would it take to teach me?" I said I could teach him, but it would take an hour a day for two weeks. He said, "Forget it, no thanks."

Any memorable interactions with athletes while doing the show?

[Knicks guard] J.R. Smith was so nice. I'm a Patriots fan, so I wanted to hate [safety] Bernard Pollard and tell him he ruined my life. [Pollard's hit in 2008 ended Tom Brady's season.] But he was such a nice guy. The only guy who was really, really awful was [former NHL winger] Sean Avery. The most surprising thing was that I really never got hit on.

What was it like when the show got canceled?

The show had always been chaotic. On Mondays it felt like we were doomed. Tuesdays we felt we were getting the hang of it. By Wednesday we thought

we had a hit. On Thursday someone was threatening to quit. And by each Friday, I was like, I don't want to do this anymore. The day we got canceled, I got three calls from Fox—they all went to voice mail—saying, "We're picking up your option. We just want you to know we see a bright future for you." I didn't even know they had an option! I was flattered.

Now you're doing No Filter for foxsports.com, and you've had some hits, like the video you did about Giants pitcher Madison Bumgarner. How did you chug six beers?

I saw some people write that the video was good up until I faked being drunk



"If I went [to Fox], the company that owned Guyism would get money. It was like a dowry. *Oh, you'll give us a cow, and we'll give you Katie.*"

at the end. Boy, I wish. It happened so fast. We got the idea, and my boyfriend, Dan, brought the beers over, and in the 40 minutes it took me to drink them, I just kept looking at him off-camera, saying, "You're so handsome, you're so supportive. Am I slurring my words?" We were supposed to go on a date night. Instead he got me four pieces of pizza and put me in bed.

You got a lot of pickup, too, for the serious piece you did about Ray Rice. Do you want to do more serious commentary?

I make silly videos, that's what I do. I don't want people to get confused. But with the Rice thing, it had been on my mind. And I thought, as a woman in sports, I had to say something. I'm happy I got my point out there, that women should be represented more in sports media. They really should be. But some people thought I was saying I should be an analyst. And I can't do that.

So what do you want to do?

I want to do something like what Jon Stewart does, for sports, something for college students to watch when they get home from the bars. They have shows like that in New Zealand and in England. But it's never worked here—people take their sports too seriously. So we're stuck with ESPN reacting to the news in the same five ways, all day, morning till night. But really, I'd just be happy writing jokes about sports and beer for other people. □



INSERT PATRIOTS RUNNING BACK HERE

BY
GREG
BISHOP

Photographs by
David E. Klutho/
Sports Illustrated

*That wasn't just New England's they'll-never-see-it-coming game plan against the Colts. It seems to be Bill Belichick's approach to finding the guys who share the backfield with Tom Brady—and it's working. New England has clawed back to the top of the AFC by recruiting an old enemy on defense and handing the ball off to ...**Jonas Gray?***



I

N RECENT months Jonas Gray had received just one autograph request. Not that he expected any. Before the Patriots signed the 24-year-old running back to their active roster in mid-October, his career consisted of a time-share at Notre Dame and, after going undrafted in 2012, two failed runs at making an NFL roster, with the Dolphins and the Ravens.

The lone request came from the fan most familiar with Gray's story, with his path from touted college recruit to fringe professional. It came from his mother, Jerri, who envied the signature of perhaps her favorite Patriot. "Can you get me a signed Tom Brady jersey?" she asked earlier this month.

"I'll try," Gray responded.
 "Just ask Tom."
 "Mom," he shot back, exasperated.

Gray relayed that story last week, when he was still an anonymous back with just 131 NFL rushing yards. But that was before Sunday, before he carried 38 times against the Colts for 199 yards and four TDs—more in one game than the backfields of the Bills, Chargers, Raiders or Steelers have scored through 11 weeks.

While it was Gray's best game since high school, the buildup to his breakout was vintage Patriots. Trade away a top-tier run-blocking guard, Logan Mankins, right before the season begins. Start 2–2 and let everyone else panic. Find a guy nobody wanted and use him in ways nobody expects. Establish yourself as a passing team, then trot out a six- or seven-man line, with blocking tight ends and a fullback, and morph into a running team for one of the most important games of the regular season. Seize control of the AFC playoff race



Don't feel bad if you didn't know Jonas Gray from Jonas Salk before Sunday. New England's Johnny-Football-come-lately is the 10th player to lead the Pats in rushing since 2011. Only the Browns have had a bigger rotation in that time (QBs excluded). Gray's running mates:

PLAYERS	TIMES LEADING NE
Stevan Ridley	31
LeGarrette Blount	10
BenJarvus Green-Ellis	8
Shane Vereen	4
Danny Woodhead	4
Jonas Gray	3
Brandon Bolden	2
Julian Edelman	1
Kevin Faulk	1
Aaron Hernandez	1



behind a guy who is sure to sign more autographs this week than he procures. All around the Patriots, supposed contenders crumbled on Sunday. The Broncos lost, giving New England a one-game lead in the race for AFC home-field advantage in the playoffs. The Lions fell, as did the Saints and the Eagles and the defending Super Bowl champion Seahawks. Meanwhile, the Patriots did not beat the Colts so much as they bludgeoned them, the final score 42–20. Their 27-point loss to the Chiefs on *Monday Night Football* in Week 4 now seems like a lifetime ago, not seven weeks.

Gray wasn't on the Patriots' active roster back then. But he was in meetings and at run-throughs as a member of the practice squad, and he remembers how offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels stood before his unit a week after the debacle in Kansas City. "We're not changing anything," McDaniels said.

That left an impression. Gray dabbled in stand-up comedy at Notre Dame—he once opened for the actor Dustin Diamond, best known as Screech from *Saved by the Bell*—but when he arrived in New England, he assumed the Patriots Ethos, a clinical approach forged by coach Bill Belichick, endorsed by Brady and other veterans. All business, no improvisation.

"I've been on two other teams, but [nothing] compares to here," Gray said. "Everybody comes to work. They know what the schedule is. They stay late. They put in extra time. It's about winning and it's not about winning. It's about the process."



NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

That's when the nerves kicked in. He can't recall much of what happened that afternoon, other than a 51-yard TD bomb to Moss (he makes sure to note that Moss motioned to the other side of the field on that play) and the final score, a 38–14 New York loss.

For six seasons Revis's Jets played the Patriots at least twice a year. Revis describes his preparation for games against Brady and Belichick as exhausting, because New England changed its game plan so drastically from week to week. There were so many ways each game could go. "I was always like, God dang it, why can't it be easier?" he says.

Revis remembered that frustration this off-season as he looked for a new team after a year in Tampa. Belichick called his cellphone. The conversation was brief; not much needed to be said. Revis hated playing the Patriots, and they hated playing him. But he had always been curious about what it would be like to work with the Hoodied One, and he jumped at the chance to do so.

Revis arrived with fellow free-agent cornerback Brandon Browner (from the Seahawks), ready to shore up the defensive backfield, but that didn't stop Brady from continuing the rivalry. The quarterback started

JONAS, OH BROTHER

Gray's fourth TD—while Rob Gronkowski buried Colts safety Sergio Brown (left, in the background)—and Revis's roping in of Reggie Wayne (above) returned the Patriots to the Super Bowl conversation.



in on Revis right away, stopping by his locker before practices to announce to anyone within earshot what he planned to do to Revis that afternoon. He declared he would open a hotel on Revis Island. Brady's competitive nature reminded the cornerback of no one he ever played with or against. No one except himself.

Revis considers all the twists that his career has taken: the holdouts, the contract squabbles, the ugly ending in New York, the lost year in Tampa. This feels, he says, like where he's supposed to be. Now that he's part of this team, New England's approach makes more sense. It's not as complicated as the term for it—the Patriot Way—suggests.

"We do our jobs. We win games. Because all we have to know is that Bill has the formula to win," he says. "All we have to do is follow it."

The 2–2 start that induced so much panic, that left outsiders perplexed? "We were fine," Revis says. "We're a good team, man. We knew that."

AFTER SUNDAY, the Colts know it too. The Patriots left no doubt. They fed Gray, behind an overloaded line, on their first drive, which went 89 yards and culminated with the theme of the night: Gray, straight-ahead, into the end zone.

Gray is not a shifty runner, not the type to dance and elude defenders. He's not all that fast either. He's the back that runs straight into the hole he's assigned,

DARRELLE REVIS hated New England—or at least he wanted to. The team that drafted him in 2007, the Jets, shares a division with the Patriots, and while the two franchises are separated by 200 miles and contrasting approaches—the difference between seeking headlines and running from them—they are bonded by mutual disdain.

Revis was introduced to the rivalry in his first professional game, at the old Giants Stadium. He exited the tunnel, looked across the field and saw Brady alongside receiver Randy Moss, his assignment as a rookie corner.

whether a defender is there or not. Less ballerina, more bulldozer. Belichick's kind of guy. (To that point, remember: These are still Belichick's Patriots, with versatility the constant, where one week's stats rarely dictate the next week's plan. Gray's career day in no way guarantees he'll do the same thing next weekend against the Lions, let alone be the lead back.)

Originally signed with the Patriots in January, Gray was moved off the practice squad onto the active roster after running back Stevan Ridley went down with a torn ACL and MCL in October. He flashed potential in his second game, against the Bears in Week 8 (86 rushing yards on 17 carries). Against Indy, he ran behind an offensive line that, despite losing Mankins in August, and despite changing almost every week, still cleared wide swaths of open space. (Dan Connolly filled Mankins's left guard role beautifully on Sunday.) And Gray ran through a seemingly stout front seven that, you may recall (Belichick certainly did), surrendered 166 rushing yards and four touchdowns to another bulldozer Patriots backup, LeGarrette Blount, in the playoffs last season. New England won that game too, and by almost the same score, 43–22.

Gray gained 84 yards on his first 10 carries on Sunday; his impact was obvious. Revis's was less so—and yet it was similar in scope. For most of the game he shadowed Colts receiver Reggie Wayne, which left the rest of the defense free to focus on stopping the run and containing the league's No. 4 receiver, T.Y. Hilton, who finished with just three catches for 24 yards. That's why Revis is so valuable when he's healthy. He can limit an entire section of the field and leave teammates free to roam elsewhere.

These are the 2014 Patriots, guided by new blood, like Gray and Revis, and old hands, like Brady and defensive tackle Vince Wilfork. Tight end Tim Wright, obtained in the Mankins trade, caught a touchdown. Receiver Brandon LaFell, a scrap-heap free-agency acquisition, gained 62 receiving yards. Julian Edelman, a quarterback converted to receiver, added 50 more.

Whatever works. By the time Gray plunged into the end zone for the fourth time, the game was effectively over. He spiked the ball into the turf and flexed his biceps for the cameras. Four games against potential playoff teams loomed on the schedule—Detroit, at Green Bay, at San Diego, Miami—but at that moment the Patriots looked, if not unbeatable, then like the team to beat.

Gray may need to update his Twitter account now; that's the small price of fame. His bio still says that he plays for the Dolphins. But Gray's mother surely sees the upside of it. Perhaps her son can trade his career day for the autograph she sought. □

How does an undersized, overly confrontational wideout survive 14 years in the NFL? He starts by following a plan that also describes his personal ethos

STEVE SMITH RULES

BY GREG BISHOP

Photographs by
Simon Bruty
Sports Illustrated



TO SURVIVE 14 NFL seasons, play in 201 games, catch 936 passes and gain 13,781 receiving yards, a man must possess . . . something. A secret, a formula, a remedy for slowing football's merciless aging process. Especially when that man stands just 5' 9". And especially when he is so—to put it mildly—outspoken.

Inside the Ravens' cafeteria, Steve Smith leans forward at a dining table. The room is empty, but he speaks softly anyway, dressed in all black. There is no simple blueprint to football longevity, he clarifies, but there are tricks. He can, in fact, rattle 13 of them off the top of his head.

The first trick: fruits and vegetables. Smith loves them. He's a self-described "salad guy," partial to broccoli, asparagus, oranges and apples, and he eats like a vegetarian until dinner, when he splurges with one piece of chicken or fish. Smith cooks and bakes. He makes a mean cinnamon-apple oatmeal muffin.

The second trick: spin class. Smith disdains lifting weights and jogging, so he substitutes training methods such as boxing and plyometrics. He tried a spin class a few years ago, wearing a knit hat along with several layers of clothes, and he sweat so much that he suffered cramps. The low impact preserves his joints.

The third trick: disengagement. Smith leaves football at the team facility. "I actually love to read," he says, citing business texts such as *The Richest Man in Babylon* and motivational works like *A Tale of Three Kings* and *The Last Lecture* among his favorite books. He collects passport stamps, traveling through China, Italy, Australia and all over Africa; he's been to Jerusalem, Barcelona, London and Paris. He says things like "Tanzania is known for tanzanite." At one point Smith pauses because he knows this all sounds strange coming from, well, Steve Smith. "There's a perception of me that I'm a hothead and an idiot," he says. "That because I'm aggressive on the football field, I'm a thug. But look, just

because you see me [doing one thing] in my workplace doesn't mean I walk around stiff-arming people and spinning cantaloupe in the grocery store."

That, of course, is what the 35-year-old Smith is known for, a career spent in perpetual combat: three documented fistfights with teammates, scores of altercations with opponents, countless spins of the football in defiant celebration after every catch, even in practice. That's the fourth trick: play angry, no matter how it looks. It's gotten Smith this far, to

MIND TRICKS

Undersized (5' 9") and overaged (35) by NFL standards, Smith still casts a long shadow: His 289 yards after the catch this season trails only five other receivers, none of whom are older than 29.

Smith **body-slammed a linebacker** and called out his strength coach. Then he promised to spend the \$5 million the Panthers owed him on a vacation.

No. 16 on the NFL's alltime receiving yards list, ahead of Art Monk and Irving Fryar, within striking distance of Steve Largent and Andre Reed.

The fifth trick: collect quotes. Smith stores dozens of them in a folder on his smartphone, from the Bible and football coaches and philosophers, and he will glance at them in moments that require inspiration, affirmation, guidance. The origin of his favorite quote is unknown: "Never be ashamed of a scar. It simply means you were stronger than whatever tried to hurt you."

"I've got some scars," Smith says.

STEVE SMITH'S NFL career started in Carolina in 2001. He led the Panthers to Super Bowl XXXVIII in '03 (where they lost to the Patriots) and the NFC championship game in '05 (where they lost to the Seahawks), the same year that he led the league in receptions (103), receiving yards (1,563) and touchdown catches (12), a receiver's triple crown.

In the 2010 off-season Smith traveled to Australia, and on the flight he was seated next to the agent for one of his own celebrity superfans: John Isner. A 6' 10" professional tennis player, and now the highest-ranked American male, Isner (who grew up in Greensboro, N.C.) had been a die-hard Panthers supporter since the team's inception, in 1995. The agent played matchmaker, and Smith watched the Australian Open that year from Isner's box. Isner later attended Smith's practices, and they swapped tennis rackets for game-worn cleats. Isner says that his signed number 89 Panthers jersey is among the first things he would grab if his house ever caught on fire.

For all that separated Smith and Isner—13 inches in height and about 2,500 miles, from Greensboro to Smith's hometown of Los Angeles—the two men weren't so different. They shared faith and family and Carolina football. "I think Steve is the greatest Panther ever," Isner says.

Was the greatest. The Smith-Carolina union started to crumble in February, after 13 seasons. Steve and his wife, Angie, were holed up in a Park City, Utah, hotel room, on vacation, when they first started reading reports in which Panthers execs were noncommittal about the receiver's future with the team. In March he found out he'd been released—on the radio.

The Panthers said it wasn't personal, but it felt that way. The rationalizations trickled in from sources within the team: Smith wasn't a leader. He was a distraction. Quarterback Cam Newton, with whom he had publicly argued on the sidelines, could never really lead Carolina with Smith there. "Really, just trying to create a perception to justify why they let me go," he says. "I didn't always say things the right way; there are a lot of things I regret. But the one thing I don't regret is how I played. Broke my forearm. Got concussions. Broke my leg in half. Played in a playoff game less than a month after a [PCL] sprain. Then, this."

In the aftermath Smith exchanged text messages with Johnny Lundy, his close friend and former college teammate at Utah. Smith was working on his sixth trick, one he'd perfected early in life: internalize slights. "Time for me to write a new chapter," he typed to Lundy. "Hopefully somebody gives this old dude a second chance."

SMITH AND LESSONS

Not even Joe Haden (right), arguably the best corner in the AFC North, could contain Smith version 14.0, whose 32-yard haul set up the Ravens' winning field goal in a Week 3 win over the Browns.



THE DAY after his release, Smith scheduled a trip to Baltimore. At the airport he spoke on the phone with Bill Belichick and Mike McCoy, his first position coach in Carolina, who became the head man with the Chargers in 2013. Afterward Smith met with three members of the Ravens' staff: coach John Harbaugh, receivers coach Bobby Engram and GM Ozzie Newsome. He was working on his seventh trick: sell yourself.

That's what Newsome wanted. He looked Smith in the eye and told him Baltimore searched for certain kinds of players, those who exuded toughness and ran toward expectations. Players like Smith. (The Ravens, in fact, had tried to trade for him in previous seasons.) "Steve likes to express himself," Newsome says, "and we felt we could provide an environment where Steve could be Steve."

Without visiting any other teams, Smith signed a three-year deal for \$10.5 million, with \$3.5 million guaranteed, plus incentives for playing time. And



STEVE SMITH



At his current pace, Smith is headed for 1,165 receiving yards. That's no small feat— but it's also not a record for his age. (Four receivers have topped that.) Here, the best seasons by anyone 35 or older

Irving Fryar, Eagles WR

AGE 35 IN 1997

1,316 RECEIVING YARDS

John Riggins, Redskins RB

AGE 35 IN 1984

1,239 RUSHING YARDS

Peyton Manning, Broncos QB

AGE 37 IN 2013

5,477 PASSING YARDS*

Sam Mills, Saints LB

AGE 35 IN 1994

115 TACKLES

Trace Armstrong, Dolphins DE

AGE 35 IN 2000

16½ SACKS

Ken Riley, Bengals CB;

Rod Woodson, Steelers FS

36 IN 1983; 37 IN 2002

8 INTERCEPTIONS

*NFL record for any age

Harbaugh sweetened the package with veteran perks: Smith could fly home to his family in Charlotte after away games, and he could take certain practice days off in-season to conserve energy.

At training camp, teammates approached Smith with a mixture of awe and curiosity. "I remember growing up watching him," says second-year receiver Marlon Brown. "I'm wondering, Who's this small guy always getting into fights with people?"

The receiver Brown saw in Baltimore carried himself the same way he had in Carolina, where one former road roommate, Kealoha Pilares, remembers Smith sitting in the front row at meetings, his chair off limits to teammates, same as the foot massager that he used throughout film sessions (that's the eighth trick). He still boasted of his hand strength—one of the smallest guys on the field with a power handshake that made linemen cringe. He still woke up early on game days to read.

On the field, too, he was the same old Smith. He caught seven passes for 118 yards in Baltimore's opener, six for 71 in Week 2, five for 101 in Week 3. In

Week 8 he fought off a defender, hauled in a long pass, spun, shook off another defender and scored an apparent game-winning 80-yard touchdown against the Bengals, only to be whistled for offensive pass interference on a play that Harbaugh called "one of the greatest I've ever seen." In Week 10, Smith body-slammed 246-pound Titans linebacker Avery Williamson on a run block, then called out Tennessee's strength coach to reporters, just for fun. Last week he promised to spend the \$5 million still owed to him by the Panthers on a bye-week vacation.

As if he hadn't already embarrassed his former team enough. In Week 4, at home against Carolina, Smith rang up 139 receiving yards and scored twice, becoming the oldest player in NFL history to accumulate 400 receiving yards in the first four games of a season. Late in that game, cameras captured Smith on the sideline as he mimicked hammering the final nail into an imaginary coffin. "You're dead!" he said. "Take your a-- back to Carolina. Make sure you done mow my lawn, too, while you're out there."

THE NINTH trick: expect nothing; want one thing.

Ever since he'd watched Jerry Rice, when he was a kid in L.A., Smith never wanted anything but to play football. Later, he came into possession of a football card: CARL PICKENS, 1,000-YARD CLUB. He wanted to join.

Back then he went by Stevonne, his given name. Stevonne ran track and played football at University High in L.A., at least when he was eligible. He had some academic issues. "He was always getting in scraps, fighting all the

time,” says his offensive coordinator at the time, Gifford Lindheim. “Of all the guys I’ve coached—and I’ve coached thousands—I really didn’t think he’d be the guy with a 14-year NFL career. He was out to prove everybody wrong.”

And he did. Smith started at Santa Monica College, where he worked at Taco Bell after practice, then transferred to Utah, where he saw snow for the first time (and started going by Steve). During a punt return against BYU in 1999, Smith dipped his right shoulder into one defender while another player collided with his left shoulder. His neck bothered him, but he finished the game. X-rays later showed a broken vertebra in his neck. The 10th trick: play hurt. Availability is as important as ability.

Smith spent six weeks in traction (“He didn’t know if he would play again,” Angie says), returned for his senior season and then was selected in the third round of the 2001 NFL draft. Recalling Smith’s tricky path to professional football and his eventual release by Carolina, Lindheim says, “Here’s a guy with a reputation for losing his temper and being a great player. Yet he stayed in Carolina for 13 years. If he was that bad of a guy, they would have gotten rid of him earlier. That’s the line Steve walks. He’s not a bad guy. But you just know you don’t want to mess with that dude.”

S MITH IS not two people, even if it sometimes appears that way and he’s often described as such. He is one person with myriad interests and a personality that trends toward extremes. That can be confusing—the little guy barking at bigger defenders, on the hunt for his next fight, his next salad, his next spin class. Then people meet him, in the grocery store and at airports, and they deliver backhanded compliments. *You’re not what I thought you would be. You’re smarter than I imagined. You’re not that bad of a guy.*

“We live in a society where people have preconceived notions, where it’s O.K. to judge,” Smith says. “You think I’m extreme; I think I’m normal. You want to put me in a box; I refuse to be put there.”

Early in his career Smith watched teammates go broke, their bank accounts drained by lavish purchases and poor investments. He made a few himself. Then he hired a financial guy; he interned at Morgan Stanley in consecutive off-seasons; he attended a financial seminar in London. Smith wanted to buy a Bentley, and eventually he did, but not until he accrued enough interest on his salary to buy the car outright—passive income, he notes, schooling a reporter on financial terms. That took 8½ years.

The calming influence, the driver behind Smith’s evolution, is Angie. The 11th trick: marry well. The couple met at Utah, married soon after and had four children. “The way my wife makes me feel is that she should be the one on the field, and I should be in the stands,” Smith says. Before his high school reunion, Smith got excited about rubbing his success in the faces of his doubters.



JUST THE TWO OF US?

It's easy (but insulting) to imagine two Steve Smiths—the one who spins footballs in foes' faces and the one who buries his face in business tomes.

“I refuse to be put in a box,”
says the man who takes
spin classes and bakes a
mean cinnamon-apple
oatmeal muffin.

Angie is the one who asked, Are you going with the right motives? “I can embarrass her sometimes,” he confesses when asked about the time he broke a teammate’s nose. “There have been some things in my career, in my life, where I’ve let her down.”

The 12th trick: be honest with yourself.

S MITH CARPOOLS. He watches soccer tournaments. He coaches a youth flag football team. He embraces the role of suburban soccer dad.

His charity, the Steve Smith Family Foundation, helps fight homelessness and domestic violence. He holds events at shelters for battered women, and he washes their feet and buys them new shoes and hires a magician to occupy their children. “I talk to these women not as an athlete,” he says, “but as a kid who has seen and felt domestic violence.” (Smith says his mother was abused by her ex-husband, not his father.)

The juxtaposition is awkward and obvious, because Smith plays for the same team that employed Ray Rice before he knocked his fiancée out in a casino hotel elevator. Smith posted on his Twitter account shortly after that video surfaced. “Keep your damn hands off women!!!! God made women for you to Lean on them Not beat on them.”

Back at the Ravens’ facility, someone asks Harbaugh about Rice, who is testifying that afternoon in his NFL appeals hearing. The coach ducks the question. Smith does not; he goes back to a joke that he has already told about the last time he was in an elevator with his wife, headed to a hotel room. Nine months later she had the baby boy, Stevonnie Jr., that they call Deuce.

Then he moves on to another topic: how long he might play. “I’m 35,” he says, a fact that he made light of this season by changing his jersey to read SMITH SR. “I’m going to play as long as I can, but I’m not going to lose valuable time with my family.”

The 13th trick: find a graceful way out, something to replace football as the outlet for his anger and competitive fire and aggression. That will be Smith’s next fight, after this season, or the next, or the season after that. Then he’s off into retirement. Salads beckon. So does spin class. □

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THE OTHER SIDE OF A

MIRACLE





The 2013 Iron Bowl was highly anticipated in Alabama. But for some, the Kick-Six proved more tragic than magic

BY THOMAS LAKE



YOU GET 29,000 mornings, if your life is the average length, and some of those mornings follow sleepless nights, and sometimes your head feels like

broken glass, and sometimes you rise in a stumbling frenzy because every minute you spend getting ready is one more minute you're late for work.

But once in a while you have another kind of morning—charged with anticipation, alive with possibility—and you get out of bed thinking maybe today will be incredible. In Alabama they get this feeling on Iron Bowl Day. This state has more college football fans per capita than any other state, and these fans wait all year for the day the Auburn Tigers play the Alabama Crimson Tide.

“If your team wins,” says David Housel, former Auburn athletic director, “you’re a better person on Monday than you were on Friday. You’re certainly better than the person whose team lost. That’s how people feel, and that’s why it’s so big, and sometimes so poisonous.”

On Nov. 30, 2013, the day of the 78th Iron Bowl, Alabama is ranked No. 1 in the country. Auburn is No. 4. The two teams have never been this good on the day of the game, which means very few mornings in Alabama history have been so charged with anticipation.

The first rays of the sun cross the Chattahoochee River at 6:20 a.m. When the sun rises at 6:28 in Montgomery, Crimson Tide placekicker Cade Foster is asleep in a hotel where the team is sequestered. Last night he turned in at a reasonable hour and lay in the dark, thinking about field goals. Eyes locked on the target. Three steps back, exhale. Two steps over, exhale. Nod to the holder and go. No reason to worry. This season he’s missed only once: 11 games, 11 wins, 11 through the uprights.

The sun rises over Mobile Bay. A minute later it rises in Birmingham, where two women sleep in a house with a red velvet cake in the kitchen cupboard. Neketa Shepherd baked it for her older sister, Michelle, and Michelle has hidden it in the cupboard so she can eat the whole thing in her own sweet time.

At 6:35 the sun rises in Tuscaloosa. At Cade Foster’s one-bedroom apartment his father, Dan, puts

on the coffee while his mother, Kelly, sleeps on the pullout couch. They drove nine hours from Southlake, Texas, to spend Thanksgiving with Cade before the game. Above the television is a papier-mâché elephant head, a

RED STORM

Alabama entered the clash with Auburn undefeated and looking to play for its third straight BCS title.

Photograph by Kevin C. Cox/Getty Images

gift to Cade from his mother, and a poster on the wall shows him kicking off in the 21–0 national-championship victory over LSU in 2012.

Cade's rifle is in the bedroom, under the bed. He keeps it for target practice and self-defense.

At 6:37 the sun rises in Carrollton, near the Mississippi line, where the outline of a man's face is visible in the attic window of the old courthouse at the center of town. The face has appeared there since 1878, ever since the night a mob gathered on the lawn and told the sheriff to hand over Henry Wells. He'd been a fugitive for two years, suspected of burglary and arson, shot twice in the leg during his apprehension, and the vigilantes wanted him dead. The sheriff hid Wells in the attic. The vigilantes stood firm. Wells could see them through the window. Then a bolt of lightning hit a tree near the courthouse and sent a ball of fire toward the attic window. The fire tempered the glass, leaving it intact but imprinting it with the rough portrait of a terrified man. The mob dispersed. Henry Wells lived to see another morning.

One man's disaster can be another man's miracle. Today the state of Alabama will experience plenty of each. Ninety people will be born. One hundred and fifty will die. Some large portion of the other 4.8 million will go to bed thinking about the final second on the scoreboard clock.

MID-MORNING at the Renaissance Hotel in Montgomery. The Auburn defensive players have gathered to watch a video pep talk from Will Herring, a former Tigers linebacker (2003–06) now with the Saints. Herring has a square jaw, big neck, brown stubble, dark glasses, backward camouflage hat. He gathers force as he goes, like a boulder rolling downhill.

"Sure, they may have more four-, five-star athletes than us. They probably got more future NFL talent than us. But lemme tell you what they *don't* have. They don't have our heart. They don't have our passion."

The Tigers have lost the last two Iron Bowls by a combined score of 91–14. But this season they've won time and again when no one thought they would. Two weeks ago they beat No. 25 Georgia 43–38 by scoring a 73-yard touchdown on fourth-and-18 with 36 seconds left.

"Now I don't care if you're from some inner city near Miami. From some farm town way out in Arkansas. Or from right here on the red clay. You chose Auburn. And that makes us family. Family's



HAND OF FATE

Foster had made 11 of 12 coming into the game, but tendinitis in his left knee and the outstretched arm of Eguae proved to be overwhelming obstacles.

willing to fight for each other. Family's willing to die for each other. Now nobody's giving us a chance. But I'm here to say that today, Nov. 30, 2013, the mighty Crimson Tide will fall in Jordan-Hare Stadium. Let's go, AU. *Owww!!!*"

The speech takes one minute. The players will later say it gave them chills. Outside the temperature rises: 40°, 45°, 50°. The tide rises in Mobile Bay. Both teams get on their buses and head for Auburn's stadium.

At 11:41 a.m., the sun reaches its peak in the sky over Carrollton. Across the street from the old courthouse sits a viewfinder that for a quarter will provide a closer look at the image of Henry Wells in the attic window, but the indelible portrait did him no good. A few days after the lightning struck, Wells died from his wounds in the courthouse basement. The sheriff understood the nature of crowds, the desire for spectacle, the things the vigilantes might do if they found the body. That's why the most famous man in Carrollton is buried in an unmarked grave.

CADE FOSTER takes the field at Jordan-Hare, still resembling the middle linebacker he played at Southlake Carroll High. He's 6' 1" and 225 pounds, and he bench-presses more than 400. As a freshman he had nine tackles in 13 games. During his sophomore year he chased down Florida return man Jeff Demps, a world-class sprinter. But now he can feel his right leg getting tired. Tendinitis in his left leg makes it hurt to plant his foot. In a normal pregame routine, he takes 11 kicks and makes them all. Today he misses three or four.



PASSION PLAY

Neketa (below, left) and Michelle loved basketball more than Bama, which irked some partygoers after the loss and led to trouble for the sisters.



His parents watch from high in the bleachers, looking past the barrier of rotunda holly that runs parallel to both sidelines. These are serious thorn bushes, nine or 10 feet across, installed to prevent a recurrence of what happened here in 1986. The Tigers might have gone to the Sugar Bowl that season if Georgia hadn't rolled onto the plains and pulled a 20–16 upset. Afterward, the Georgia fans rushed the field, desecrating the Auburn logo, disrespecting the police, behaving so badly for such a long time that the groundskeepers sprayed high-powered water hoses in the air. In came the thorn bushes, which have generally worked. It's been 12 years since fans rushed the field at Jordan-Hare.

Early afternoon in Birmingham. Michelle Shepherd drops her children off with their father and returns home to get ready for her friend's Iron Bowl party. She and Neketa wear matching crimson T-shirts that say BUILT BY BAMA. The sisters like football, but they love basketball. Neketa made first team all-state for Demopolis High back in 1999, and Michelle was at every game. They take vacations in South Florida to watch the Heat. Neketa would rather watch today's game at home, away from the raucous and divided crowd in Hoover, but Michelle wants to go. Before they leave, Michelle takes out her personal red velvet cake and cuts another piece.

The temperature rises in Sylacauga, where exactly 59 years ago, on Nov. 30, 1954, on a warm afternoon like this one, a meteorite fell from the clear blue sky. It pierced a roof, glanced off a radio, bruised a sleeping woman through two quilts and landed on the floor, a black rock about the

size of a small loaf of bread. The woman opened her eyes and said, "I think the chimney's falling down." Her mother called the fire department. People all around town had seen the explosion in the sky, and now they converged on the home of Ann Elizabeth Hodges to see the falling star and the woman it had touched. An eyewitness named Billy Field would later say the cars were lined up like it was the Alabama-Auburn game.

The woman's husband got home from work and saw a parade of strangers outside his house.

Today in Alabama, 90 people will be born; 150 will die. Many of the other 4.8 million will go to bed **thinking about the final second on the scoreboard clock.**

As Eugene Hodges pressed through the crowd, someone said, "Hey, buddy. Go back and wait in line like everybody else."

KICKOFF, 2:41 P.M. On the first play from scrimmage, Alabama running back T.J. Yeldon goes for 31 yards into Auburn territory. Cade Foster watches and prepares. That summer he trained with Morten Andersen, the leading scorer in NFL history, who taught him that the kick begins on the sideline: He should look at the space between the uprights, focus on the target and stay 20 yards behind the offense as it moves down the field so that when it's time to head out for the kick, he's walking toward the uprights and the target is getting wider, and the kick is getting easier. This one is 44 yards, inside the left hash. Foster lines up. Three steps back, exhale. Two steps over, exhale. Two seasons ago those steps were too short, complicating the approach, making his foot drag or his knee bend, throwing everything off. With practice he got the problem fixed, but fatigue has made it return. The kick sails wide left. Foster goes to the sideline to wait for another chance.

The game is sloppy all around. Alabama bites on play-action, leaving receiver Ricardo Louis open deep, but quarterback Nick Marshall throws it behind him. The Tigers punt. The Tide punt, or try to, but Auburn defensive back Ryan Smith gets a partial block. Then Marshall takes charge, hitting receiver Sammy Coates for 21 yards on third-and-18, sprinting past the Alabama defense for a 45-yard touchdown. Ten minutes in, Auburn leads 7–0.

Outside the stadium everything slows down.



People all
around town
had seen the
explosion in
the sky, and
now they
converged
on the home
of Ann
Elizabeth
Hodges
to see the
falling star
and the
woman it
had touched.

Nielsen ratings show that nearly 60% of homes in the Birmingham market are tuned in. The Alabama Law Enforcement Agency sees a significant drop in crashes, arrests and citations. The Alabama Center for Health Statistics reports 69% fewer weddings than on an average Saturday. The Shepherd sisters eat chicken wings and Ro-Tel dip at the party in Hoover. The second quarter belongs to the Tide. Quarterback AJ McCarron throws a touchdown pass, and Foster buries the extra point. After an Auburn fumble, Tide receiver Kevin Norwood burns senior corner Chris Davis on a double move and hauls in a 21-yard touchdown. Foster's extra point goes just inside the left upright. The Tigers punt again. Alabama scores again. This time Foster puts the extra point down the middle. With 3:48 left in the half, Bama leads 21-7, but Auburn scores at the end of the half, cutting the lead to seven.

Night crosses the Georgia line, moving south and west. Tracy Wolfson of CBS Sports catches Auburn head coach Gus Malzahn before he leaves the field at halftime.

"If it's a close game in the fourth quarter," he says, "I like our chances."

EARLY FOURTH QUARTER, full dark, no moon. Auburn has rallied to tie it at 21. An Alabama drive stalls. Foster comes on for a field goal, 28 yards from the right hash. Kick is up. Kick is good. Kick is erased. *False start, 77 of the offense, five-yard penalty, repeat fourth down.*

This time Foster stubs the ground first, raising a small cloud of dust, and the ball spins weirdly to the left. No good. Game still tied at 21.

Around this time, Alvin Willis, a maintenance worker for the city of Auburn, and Catrina Cook, assistant director of environmental services, leave for the intersection of College Street and Magnolia Avenue. When Auburn wins, fans celebrate by hurling several tons of toilet paper in the air. The tradition began in 1972, when the Tide came in ranked second and Auburn beat the No. 2 out of 'em.

Thus, Willis and Cook miss the fourth quarter so they can stand at Toomer's Corners with a crew of 16 and a knuckle boom truck in case they have to clean up. The fans used to paper the old oaks that stood above the intersection, but three years ago, after the Tigers won the 2010 Iron Bowl, an Alabama



fan poured herbicide on their roots and killed them.

Auburn punts. Alabama scores on a spectacular 99-yard touchdown from McCarron to receiver Amari Cooper. Foster's extra point wavers left but goes through. Tide 28, Tigers 21.

The Tide get the ball back and drive inside the 15. A field goal would give them a 10-point lead with less than six minutes to go. It would be 30 yards, about the same distance as the kick that was wiped out by the penalty. But Alabama goes for it on fourth-and-one. Auburn gets the stop and the ball with 5:34 to go.

Alabama's D forces another punt, but the ensuing drive stalls after a holding penalty. On comes Foster with 2:41 left. The kick is 44 yards. Three steps back, two steps over, nod to the holder and go. Everything feels right. The ball is true coming off Foster's foot, the trajectory low for better distance. Battles rage along the line of scrimmage. Auburn's Gabe Wright jumps too early, but he hears a thudding sound to his right. His fellow lineman Nosa Eguae has blindly put up a hand and blocked the field goal that would have clinched the Iron Bowl for Alabama.

THE LAST MINUTE ticks away as Auburn marches into Tide territory. Fifty seconds. Forty-five. Nick Marshall takes the snap and rolls left. He tucks the ball and lures the defenders, then switches hands at the line of scrimmage and pushes a weird little duck of a throw over their heads to Coates for a 39-yard touchdown. The game is tied at 28.

On the Alabama sideline Cade Foster sees the



backup kicker warming up. No one has told him he's being replaced.

Tide coach Nick Saban seems content to play for overtime. With seven seconds left from his own 38, McCarron hands off to Yeldon. The defenders, expecting a long pass, drop back in coverage and leave a gaping hole. Yeldon bursts through the line and gains 23 yards before stepping out-of-bounds. Ten million people watching the game on CBS see a graphic that says **END OF REGULATION**. But officials are checking the replay.

"After review," referee Matt Austin says, "the runner's foot touched out-of-bounds at the 39-yard line with one second on the clock."

Saban sends out the field goal team. Dan and Kelly Foster look for Cade. When he was in high school, they took him to the stadium on days off so he could practice his kicking. Dan was the holder. Kelly retrieved the footballs. "We're proud of you no matter what," they told him. "We love you no matter what. You don't have to play football." But he wants to play, and they love watching him, and now they find him on the sideline, just another spectator. Saban has put in Adam Griffith, a redshirt freshman with a strong leg, to attempt a 57-yarder to win the game.

"Girl," Michelle Shepherd says to her sister, "this game is getting heavy."

Auburn coach Gus Malzahn calls timeout. He sees the backup kicker on the field and wonders what Saban is planning. "Let's put Chris back there," an assistant coach says. They assign their punt returner, Davis, to the end zone in case the kick falls short.

The snap is good. The hold is good. The kick

WILD SWING

When Griffith's attempt (left) fell short, Davis caught it and ran, setting off a chain of events marked by both euphoria and sadness.

is short. It falls from the night sky into Davis's waiting arms. When he catches it, his right foot is already planted for takeoff. He tears out of the end zone, looking for a seam up the middle, then sees an opening toward the left sideline. One by one, he sprints past the Tide linemen. His teammates on the field-goal-block team are blockers now. Alabama linebacker Adrian Hubbard is one of the better tacklers on the field, but he's cut down by two men in navy blue. Davis runs on.

On long returns the kicker himself serves as tackler of last resort. Foster may be the best-tackling kicker in college football, but he can only watch as his substitute gets blindsided by a 284-pound defensive tackle. Davis crosses midfield with a clear path to the end zone. God is good, he thinks as he runs for the winning touchdown.

A disaster. A miracle. The face in the window, the falling star.

AS DAVIS crosses the goal line, others cross into delirium. His teammate, defensive back Jonathon Mincy, is so overjoyed that he grabs Davis around the middle and throws him to the ground. The Tigers pounce on their hero. Davis can't breathe. Neither can defensive end Ladarius Owens, trapped alongside him at the bottom of the pile.

A sort of kamikaze Pied Piper makes the first foray across the wall of thorn bushes, and each follower helps clear the way for the next. Fans pour onto the field like water from a ruptured dam. Someone scatters a loved one's ashes. Someone looks Malzahn in the eye and snatches the visor off his head. Fans steal pylons, chunks of turf, thorns from the conquered bushes. Eight or 10 guys pick up a costly exercise machine from the Auburn sideline and carry it toward the exit. The crowd is so large and persistent that 300-pound Auburn lineman Alex Kozan needs a full hour to wade through it and reach the locker room. Outside, the toilet paper is flying. It hangs from the trees and curls over the wires and collects on the ground like snow.

At the apartment in Hoover, Auburn fans laugh at Alabama fans. "Y'all ain't gonna be No. 1 no more," someone says. The Shepherd sisters laugh too, because even though they're wearing Bama T-shirts, they would rather be watching the Heat.

"It doesn't really matter," Neketa says.

Another Tide fan overhears them, a woman they don't know. "Do you not realize Alabama just lost," she says, "and you're sitting here laughing?"

Outside in the parking lot, the woman, pulls a

THE IRON BOWL

gun and shoots Michelle Shepherd in the chest. Michelle dies there, at 36, leaving behind three children, one sister and an unfinished cake in the kitchen cupboard.

THE AUBURN fans wear navy blue and they wave orange pom-poms, and in covering the field they make a sort of Impressionist painting, a night sky full of exploding stars. David Housel remains in his seat for a long time, taking in the colors. He's 67, and in all his life he's never seen anything more beautiful than that dark-blue sky and those orange stars.

You were a child and you wanted those stars, to pull them from the sky and hold them in your fist. You wanted to see what it was like, and if you couldn't reach the stars then maybe you settled for the flame of a candle, angry when someone pulled your hand away, angrier when no one did. And even after you touched fire for the first time, you kept thinking of ways to touch it again. This is how mobs form: heat, light, desire, the actual emotion less important than its burning intensity. They caught Henry Wells, and a mob gathered on the courthouse lawn. The star fell on Ann Hodges, and a mob gathered in her living room. Chris Davis crossed the goal line, and a mob took the breath from his lungs.

Now Davis escapes in the dark, visits his family at their RV, watches a little football, eats some chips and Ro-Tel dip. And then, instead of going downtown and getting crushed again, he goes back to his dormitory for the night.

On the ride back to Tuscaloosa, Cade Foster pulls out his iPhone and opens the Twitter app. He sees a sharp increase in followers, a long list of mentions. Someone tells @Foster_43 to kill himself. Another suggests he drink bleach. "I'm coming for you," writes a third, "you gonna die tonight." It goes on like that. Outside his apartment he finds a police officer standing guard.

The night is long in Tuscaloosa, almost 14 full hours, with barely a trace of the moon. Foster hears a knock at the door and assumes the worst. He goes to the bedroom for his rifle.

"Cade," his mother calls from the living room. "It's your buddies." Foster comes back without the gun to see three teammates who are here to make sure he's all right. He will be, eventually.

When they go, his mother gives him a hug. "The sun will come up tomorrow," she says, and the tide falls in Mobile Bay, and the bars close in Auburn, and the world turns, another mile every four seconds, carrying Alabama toward morning. □



SUGAR BOWL

1 ALABAMA

The Tide controlled all but about six minutes of their 25-20 win over Mississippi State. Bama can be beaten, as proved by Ole Miss, but it's still the hardest team to put away.

BAYLOR 4

TCU's struggle in a 34-30 victory at Kansas should make the committee finally realize that the spot should go to the head-to-head winner between the Bears and the Horned Frogs.

SI PLAYOFF PREDICTION

NOV. 24

BY ANDY STAPLES

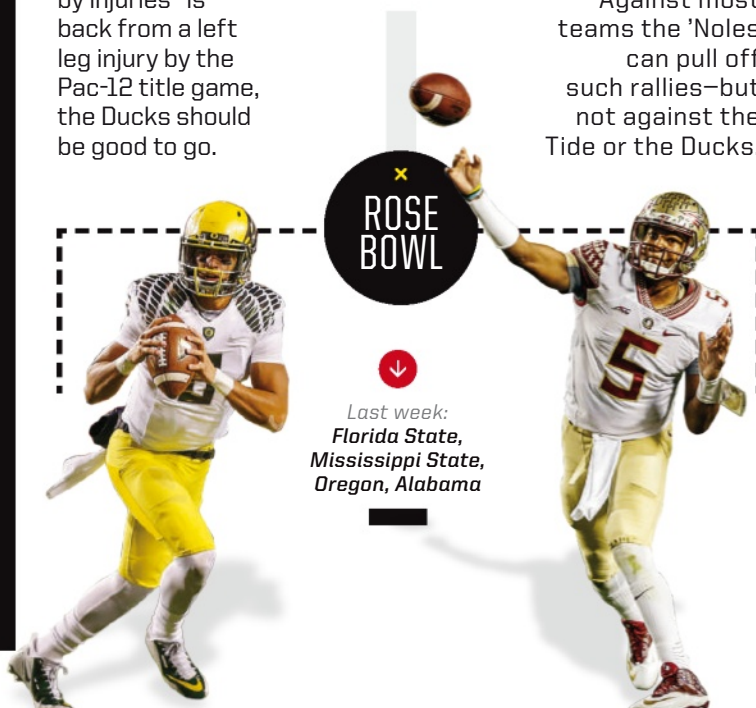
From now through the Dec. 8 issue SI's college football insider will assess which teams should make the final four.

2 OREGON

As long as senior center Hroniss Grasu—who has been the glue of a line ravaged by injuries—is back from a left leg injury by the Pac-12 title game, the Ducks should be good to go.

FLORIDA STATE 3

QB Jameis Winston has been superb in four second-half comebacks. Against most teams the 'Noles can pull off such rallies—but not against the Tide or the Ducks.



ROSE BOWL

Last week: Florida State, Mississippi State, Oregon, Alabama



“Don’t be scared to fail.”

Chris Battle, Assistant Coach, Barrow High School [Alaska]
Underdogs—Season 3, Episode 1

**Sports
Illustrated**
UNDERDOGS

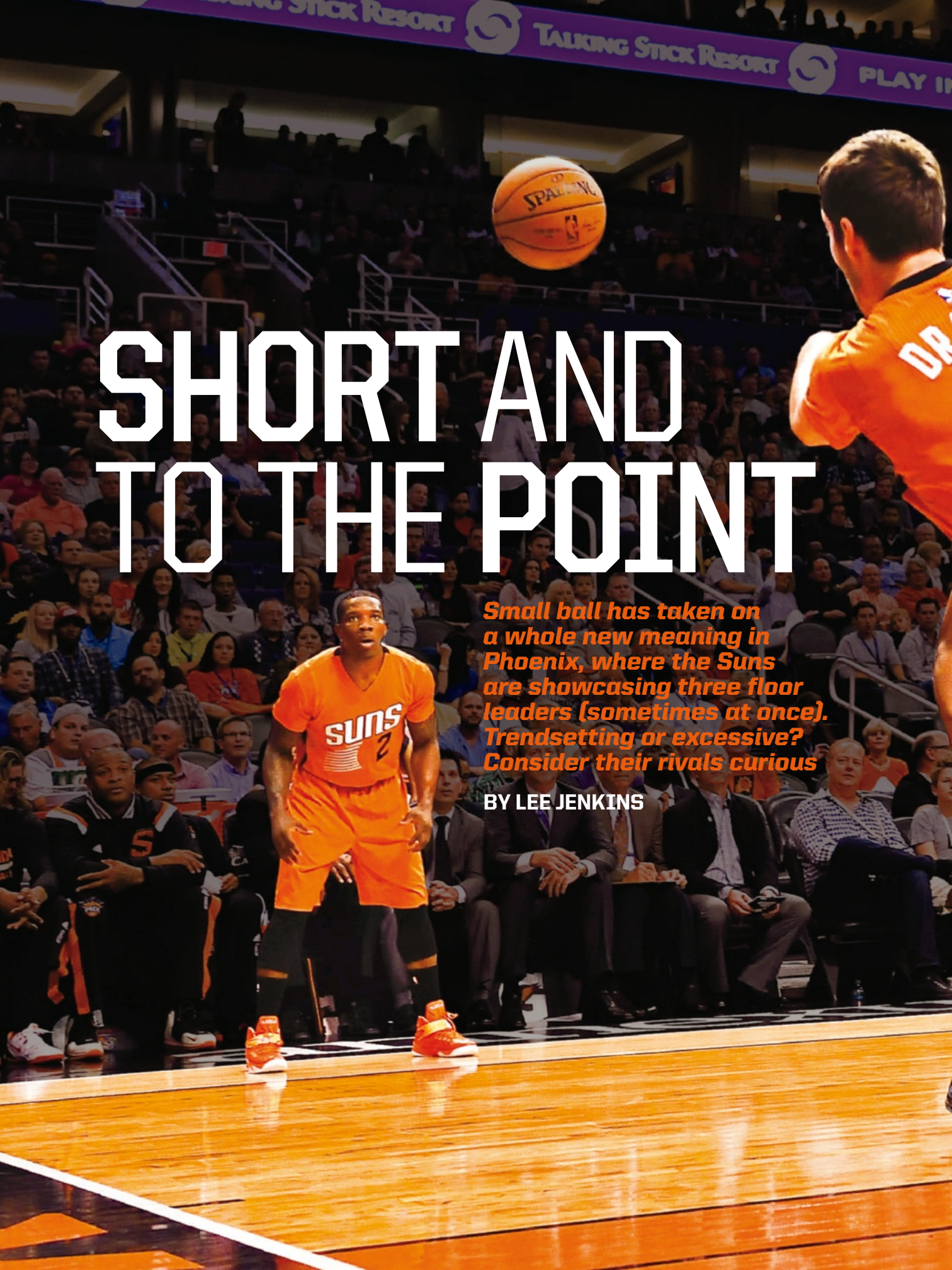
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New episodes airing throughout November and December.

SI.COM/UNDERDOGS

Guts Illustrated | Glory Illustrated | **Sports Illustrated**

A full-page photograph of a Phoenix Suns player in an orange jersey with the number 2, standing on a basketball court. A basketball is suspended in the air above him. The background shows a large crowd of spectators in an arena. At the top of the image, a purple banner reads "TALKING STICK RESORT" and "PLAY IN".

SHORT AND TO THE POINT

Small ball has taken on a whole new meaning in Phoenix, where the Suns are showcasing three floor leaders (sometimes at once). Trendsetting or excessive? Consider their rivals curious

BY LEE JENKINS



→ **FOR 30 YEARS** Marinko Dragic taught the sons and daughters of Ljubljana, Slovenia, how to drive. They came to him when they turned 17 and plopped down behind the wheel of his old Mercedes A-Class. The hatchback is dually controlled, so Marinko could occupy the passenger's seat and still slam the brakes when a heavy-footed teen got tempted by a yellow light. Navigating Slovenia's capital city is daunting, with its jumble of arcane traffic signs and narrow one-way streets. "You need 30 hours of lessons," recalls Suns point guard Goran Dragic, the oldest of Marinko's two sons. "Those were the hardest 30 hours of my life." Goran put in more than the required time. He started driving when he was in middle school, through parking lots and down open roads, always in the A-Class and always with his dad. When Goran wanted to speed, Marinko pumped the brakes, and when he wanted to cruise, Marinko tapped the gas. Goran, never in an accident, grew up thinking of driving as a joint enterprise.

During his first 2½ NBA seasons, in Phoenix, Dragic backed up Steve Nash. During his next 1½, in Houston, he split duties with Kyle Lowry. When Dragic returned to the Suns as a full-time starter in 2012–13, he averaged career highs of 14.7 points and 7.4 assists, but it was not the joyride he anticipated. Dragic ran almost every pick-and-roll, maneuvered around nightly double teams and used the little wind he had left to chase whichever dervish was on the docket: Tony Parker or Russell Westbrook, Stephen Curry or Chris Paul. Although Dragic held up admirably, the Suns finished last in the Western Conference with 57 losses and were left wondering if they could use more hands on the wheel.

Eighteen months later, Dragic bounds out of a breakfast meeting at the JW Marriott in Los Angeles, flanked by Eric Bledsoe and Isaiah Thomas. They stand, respectively, 6' 3", 6' 1" and 5' 9", a downsized variation of a Big Three, embarking on a small-ball experiment not even Mike D'Antoni dared to try. Imagine a troika of hyperaggressive point guards directing the equivalent of a 48-minute fast break: catching outlet passes on either side of the court, initiating multiple pick-and-rolls in the same possession and alternating against the likes of Parker, Westbrook, Curry and Paul. Phoenix is betting

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Dragic and Bledsoe (2) offer a variety of scoring options: drive-and-dish, two-man fast breaks and constant pick-and-rolls.

that the best way to combat the league's legion of ballhandlers is to triple down on them. Over the summer the Suns accelerated the long-running Lilliputian revolution, buttressing Dragic by re-signing Bledsoe, adding Thomas and even spending a first-round pick on 6' 3" Tyler Ennis of

Photographs by
John W. McDonough
Sports Illustrated

Syracuse. They wear jersey numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4, as though modeling the crowded depth chart.

Some have suggested that if the NBA were a 6' 5"-and-under league, Phoenix would win the championship. But the ranks are still populated by giants, in short supply for the Suns, especially after losing power forward Channing Frye to Orlando in free agency. The team will scrap just to reach the playoffs, with all the floor generals struggling for ownership of the offense and control of the ball. The Suns are innovative. They are entertaining. Whether they are setting a trend or congesting a backcourt remains to be seen. But any Big Three, particularly one in miniature, needs time to grow. "We're doing something the NBA has never witnessed," Thomas says. "A few years ago nobody would have even thought about it."

THE HAND CHECK was eliminated in 1994, the forearm to a player facing the basket in '97 and contact above the free throw line in '99. The rule changes accomplished what the NBA intended, unlocking offenses, but the ramifications were wider than the league imagined. "Back in the day you could get into guys [defensively], guide them," says Phoenix coach Jeff Hornacek. "All of a sudden you couldn't touch them, which is why everyone started running the pick-and-roll. It became almost impossible to defend." Point guards typically made the best triggermen because of their ability to angle around screens, attack the basket and dish to open shooters. The proliferation of the pick-and-roll spawned the glorification of the point guard.

On the night of the 2006 draft, the Celtics traded the seventh pick to the Trail Blazers for a package highlighted by point guard Sebastian Telfair. With Delonte West already on the roster, Boston appeared to have enough ballhandlers. But a 26-year-old Celtics scout named Ryan McDonough helped persuade his bosses to extract a late-first-round pick from Phoenix so they could grab one more point guard, Kentucky's Rajon Rondo. "It's so hard to defend those guys with all the screen-and-rolls," McDonough reasons. "If you don't have a good one, or two, you fall behind." In '06, Rondo was the first point guard chosen, at No. 21. In '07, Mike Conley went fourth. In '08, Derrick Rose went first and Westbrook fourth. In '09, five point guards went in the lottery. In '10, coach John Calipari put a point guard in the top five for the third straight year, No. 1 John Wall of Kentucky. "I want more!" jokes Calipari, who had yet another Wildcats point guard, Brandon Knight, drafted eighth in '11.

"You go through cycles in recruiting," says Orlando Antigua, a former Calipari assistant, who



TALL ORDER

Thomas was a long shot to make the NBA after being drafted with the 60th and final pick in 2011, but he has used a combination of solid shooting and craftiness in the lane to become one of the league's most explosive scorers.

is now the coach at South Florida. "Sometimes there is an abundance of big guys. Sometimes it is wings. Lately it has been point guards."

Two popular brands of defense emerged to counter the dynamic drivers: the Chicago variety, which loads up as many as four players on the strong side, encouraging point guards to swing the ball, and the Miami version, which traps point guards, forcing them to find outlets. Teams with adept secondary ballhandlers, who can exploit collapsed defenses and run weakside pick-and-rolls, put themselves at an immense advantage. The 2011 Finals turned when the Mavericks inserted backup point guard J.J. Barea into the starting lineup with Jason Kidd. Dallas vanquished the Heat in the next three games.

Phoenix hired McDonough to be general manager in May 2013, and he immediately tabbed a coach intimately familiar with a dual-point-guard system. Hornacek ran the point at Iowa State and in the NBA with the Suns, until they acquired speed merchant Kevin Johnson from the Cavaliers. Hornacek, pushed to shooting guard, was confused and disappointed. But the move invigorated his team and enhanced his career. Phoenix scored close to 115 points per game, with Johnson sprinting down the court and kicking to the 6' 4" Hornacek, who could rise up or drive on slower wings. He shared the memories with Dragic after McDonough swiped Bledsoe from the Clippers in July '13, leaving the incumbent ballhandler bewildered about his role.

The Suns turned the calendar back to the late '80s, going 23–11 with Dragic and Bledsoe in the starting lineup. Dragic fed Bledsoe when he drew



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an inferior defender. Bledsoe fed Dragic when he found a groove. Phoenix led the NBA in fast-break offense, but Bledsoe missed 39 games to injury and Dragic was hobbled by April. To sustain their two-point-guard assault, the Suns needed a third.

"Why?" Thomas asked, when McDonough invited the 25-year-old to Phoenix in early July for a free-agent visit. He was a scoring point guard who averaged 20.3 points and 6.3 assists last season for the Kings, almost identical to Dragic, much the same as Bledsoe. He didn't understand why a team would want three players with overlapping skills. Thomas was incredulous until a dinner with Suns brass, when McDonough told him, "Sorry we can't take you to Fish House Café." Fish House is Thomas's favorite restaurant back home in Tacoma, Wash. He is such a devotee that the logo is tattooed on his right arm. He was awed by the GM's research. *Maybe they really do want me*, he thought.

Hornacek laid out the specifics of the scheme: two point guards on the floor at most times, and occasionally three. A rebounder, instead of waiting under the basket for a designated ballhandler, fires to whichever one is closest. The point guards race down the court, preferably beating the defense or setting up on opposite sides so they can scramble the D with successive pick-and-rolls. Everybody stays fresh because minutes are limited, and nobody has to spend an entire quarter getting trucked



Coaches can placate a restless shooting guard by sliding him over to small forward for a few minutes. Hornacek's challenge is different. He can't exactly toss a second ball on the court.

1-2 PUNCH

Though Dragic and Bledsoe (above) formed a devastating duo last season, Phoenix added more backcourt help to keep them fresh.

by Westbrook or Rose. Thomas, who yearned for a regular starting spot in Sacramento during the past three years, agreed to come off the bench again.

Other teams feature multiple point guards, but they can't always flourish together. Ideally, one of the facilitators must shoot consistently from outside (like Dragic and Thomas) and one must be able to defend bigger opponents (like Bledsoe and Dragic). Phoenix used the entire triumvirate to close out a win over the Spurs on Halloween because Thomas could defend Parker while Bledsoe and Dragic rotated on Danny Green and Manu Ginóbili. A more imposing shooting guard or small forward can decimate the quirky alignment, as

Gordon Hayward did 24 hours later in a Jazz victory.

"In this league, at this position, you get no breaks," says Lakers point guard Ronnie Price. "Every night you have issues. Against them it's more issues because you have three guys who can rush the ball up, and weakside pick-and-roll becomes just as dangerous as strongside pick-and-roll. But if you're asking whether it's going to work long term, I'm not sure anybody knows yet."

THOMAS WAS the 60th and final pick in 2011. "Too short," he says. "Mr. Irrelevant." Dragic was the 45th pick in '08. "Too skinny," he says. "Supposed to be back in Slovenia in a year." Bledsoe, the 18th pick in '10, didn't participate in organized basketball until seventh grade and was barely recruited until his senior season at Parker High in Birmingham. He played off the ball at Kentucky, in deference to Wall, as Thomas did at Washington, for Abdul Gaddy. But all the point guards happened upon a transformational tutor. Isiah Thomas took an interest in his near namesake, Nash mentored Dragic, and Paul groomed Bledsoe when he was still running fourth string for the Clippers.

They are flawed but fearless, charging at 7-footers with a strength that belies their size. Thomas creeps inside and unleashes a skyscraping floater. "That's the giant killer," he coos. Dragic mimics the Nash up-and-under and the Rondo ball fake, but also utilizes a move all his own, planting a knee in a defender's midsection to clear space at the rim. The 24-year-old Bledsoe doesn't need many tricks, having built his body into a bulldozer with a 6' 7½" wingspan, plowing the lane. "We go about our business differently," says Thomas, "but our story is basically the same."

Point guards, by nature, come with dominant personalities and control issues. They have spent a lifetime with the ball in their hands, and while they are willing to share it, they decide when and with whom. Plenty of classic teams depended on dual initiators—Dennis Johnson and Danny Ainge for the '80s Celtics, Walt Frazier and Earl Monroe for the '70s Knicks. But DJ was always the floor general, and so was Clyde. That's where the Suns deviate. They don't have one general. They have three. "It can work," says Jerry Sichting, who played point guard for Boston in the '80s and is now a Phoenix assistant. "It just takes very smart and unselfish players."

The Suns' point guards are sacrificing stats—each was down at least three points per game from last season in the team's 5–5 start—and ceding control. On Nov. 4 against the Lakers, Bledsoe appeared grief-stricken after he played just 21 minutes and

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took four shots. The next day against the Grizzlies, Dragic clocked 26 minutes and nine shots. Two nights later against the Kings, Thomas logged 17 minutes with four shots. "Someone is always going to be left out," he acknowledged. Such is life in every organization, but coaches can placate a restless shooting guard by sliding him over to small forward for a few minutes, and vice versa. Hornacek's challenge is different. He can't exactly toss a second ball on the court.

"I love having two point guards," says a West scout. "I don't know about three. These are all tough-minded guys who want to be on the floor at the end and won't be happy if they're not." Twenty franchises, and maybe as many as 25, are content with their starting point guard. But Calipari and others keep churning out more. Perhaps the top prospect in the 2015 draft is an 18-year-old point guard from the Democratic Republic of the Congo named Emmanuel Mudiay, who is playing in China. If a club is set at point guard, does it pass on a playmaker like Mudiay or slot him next to its starter? Rivals are looking to the Suns for clues.

"What you're trying to do is mesh your best players," Calipari says. "I've used three centers at the same time because those were my best players. But the best team you can have is with two point guards, who have point guard mentalities and can score."

Phoenix has committed \$70 million to Bledsoe and \$27 million to Thomas, with the 28-year-old Dragic eligible to opt out of his contract in July. If the Suns run into point guard gridlock, they can always trade one or let Dragic walk. But if they stick with this rollicking three-man weave, they may change how lineups are viewed and call into question the essence of the off-guard. They seem to have made one compelling convert already. When Phoenix faced the Lakers in the preseason, Floyd Mayweather sat courtside at the Honda Center in Anaheim, jawing with Thomas and Bledsoe. After Thomas hit a buzzer beater to force overtime, Mayweather leaped from his seat, nearly spilling his caramel corn. After Thomas sank a three-pointer in OT, which helped put the Lakers away, Mayweather hollered at him, "I see you, IT, I see you!" Mayweather, who befriended Thomas several years ago, showed up at Staples Center the following evening for another eyeful.

The Suns are basketball welterweights, small and speedy, driven and daring. "I think Floyd," Thomas says, "is going to like watching us play." □



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RISE OF THE MACHINE



COREY KLUBER has been a Cy Young winner for precisely 44 hours, and, to hear him tell it, life feels a lot like it did before he got the American League award. It's a Friday afternoon at a coffee shop nestled among the pines and birches near Jacksonsville, just down the road from his home, and Kluber is sitting at an outdoor table nursing his Americano, basking in a bright November sun. Sure, he belongs to history now, but he's still a sleep-deprived father in charge of bath time, still a T-shirt and flip-flops kind of guy who, in the middle of this crowded café, would be asked for a selfie only if he were wearing a neon sign around his neck that read NASTIEST RIGHTHANDED PITCHER ON THE PLANET.

Kluber, bearded and broad-shouldered, says that he's never—not once—been recognized outside northern Ohio. Even this summer, as he was conjuring up images of Gaylord Perry, the Indians' ace hardly turned heads in sports-crazed Cleveland. Asked how many times he's been made by a fan away from the ballpark, and Kluber, peering through his sunglasses, says, "You might not be able to count it on one hand—but two, yeah, definitely."

Great seasons, it turns out, can still sneak up on us in this accelerated age, even from a 28-year-old who's never made an All-Star team. ("Not even in the minors," Kluber says.) "As a starting pitcher, you kind of know everybody; at least I do," Clayton Kershaw said of Kluber as he accepted the NL Cy Young last Wednesday. "But I definitely didn't realize how good he was." Almost no one believed with conviction that Kluber would beat Mariners ace Felix Hernandez, not even Kluber himself. But that's not to say that the voters, many relying on advanced metrics, didn't get it right. Kluber, who went 18–9 with a 2.44 ERA and 269 strikeouts in 235⅓ innings, has a strong case as the best pitcher in 2014 not named Kershaw.

*The ace of the Indians is used to anonymity—but **Corey Kluber's** unexpected Cy Young Award will change that. (Maybe.) The Klubot isn't great at expressing emotion, but he's extremely adept at getting batters out*



BY ALBERT CHEN

Photograph by
Tom Szczerbowski/Getty Images



FIT FOR A KING

While Kluber's 18-9 record and 2.44 ERA were inferior to Hernandez's, advanced statistics—which took into account Cleveland's patchy defense—helped him carry the day.

COREY KLUBER

"It wasn't just his starts—it was every bullpen session too," says Cleveland pitching coach Mickey Callaway. "I was there for the 60 times he threw off a mound, and he was totally locked in each time. It was extraordinary." Even at the height of his dominance—he was 9–3 with a 1.73 ERA over the second half—Kluber had little more than a cult following. That included the Internet-savvy Indians fans who produced memes reflecting how emotionless he is on the field and spawned a nickname: Klubot.

True, Kluber rarely changes his expression—*stoic* is a more frequently used adjective when describing him than *rightthander*. "Once in a blue moon you'll see a grimace," says Callaway, while noting the time that Klubot "snatched his glove, and gently hit the water cooler and got some water on his shirt." Even Kluber's celebrations feel routine. After a three-hit shutout of Seattle on July 30, "I was so pumped," says catcher Yan Gomes. "But then when I ran to him, it was more like an awkward hug between us."

During the MLB Network's announcement of the Cy Young Awards, Kluber was standing by from a Jacksonville country club; when he won, he turned to his off-camera family and flashed a quick smile and thumbs-up, reacting more like someone who'd successfully changed a tire than a pitcher who'd just received the game's most prestigious honor.

The Klubot can, in fact, emote. Have a cup of joe with the coffee-addicted hurler (the morning of each start he has a venti Americano—then another five cups of coffee through the day), and you'll find out that he is a self-deprecating, dry-witted Texan (he grew up in the Dallas area before attending Stetson, where he met his wife, Amanda) who dotes on his daughters, two-year-old Kendall and 10-month-old Kennedy, and that he is the biggest prankster in the Indians' clubhouse. To lighten the mood during a horrid skid, Kluber waddled out onto the field during batting practice wearing a chicken outfit. In July players wore T-shirts that read JK CONSTRUCTION COMPANY: I BREAK IT. YOU FIX IT, a playful jab at second baseman Jason Kipnis, who tends to unleash his frustration on chairs, air conditioners and whatever else might be nearby.

When reporters asked Kipnis who was behind the joke, Kipnis said, "The secret guy behind everything: Corey Kluber."

THIS IS like the old Michael Jordan being left off his high school team story," says Ruben Niebla, introducing a tale he's been telling a lot recently. In 2011, Niebla was the pitching coach at Triple A Columbus, working



I. KLUBOT

Kluber's unchanging mien and precise pitching prompted memes from Twitter users @MLBastian (top, bottom) and @SeanMcL216.

**"I was there
for the
60 times he
threw off a
mound," says
Callaway,
"and he
was totally
locked in
each time."**

with a 25-year-old who had a meandering fastball and a 5.56 ERA. That year the Clippers won the Triple A national championship—and they did it with Kluber stuck on the bench. "We just thought he wasn't good enough to break the rotation. The three guys [in the rotation] are no longer in professional baseball," says Niebla.

Baseball is littered with tales of one bullpen session changing a pitcher's fortunes; for Kluber, it happened one May afternoon in 2012 at Columbus. After getting blasted in a start, he was alternating four-seamers that stayed dangerously up in the zone and two-seamers that he was effectively locating down.

"Let's try this: Stick to the two-seamer," Niebla said. Kluber began throwing sinkers that dotted both sides of the plate with a pointillist's precision. He ditched his four-seamer, and in his next start at Syracuse was so dominant that Indians special assistant Tim Belcher called Callaway from the stands to say, "If he were pitching against big leaguers today with that kind of stuff, he'd be just as good." Kluber's two-seamer is the pitch that sets up the others: the slider with the fiendishly late movement; the cutter that bores in on lefthanders; the changeup that he vows to work on this winter, to make it more of a weapon against lefties.

Kluber's coronation as the AL's best pitcher was in part a product of voters placing less emphasis on stats like win percentage and even ERA—Kluber trailed Hernandez in both—and turning to metrics like Fielding Independent Pitching, which in essence attempts to strip out variables like luck and team defense. (Kluber, who had one of the worst defenses in baseball behind him, had a better FIP than King Felix.) That he's become something of a face for the statistical revolution is amusing to Kluber. "When I hear an acronym and don't know what it means, I assume it's an advanced stat, and I try not to concern myself with it," he says. "It's not about numbers for me; it's all about the process."

Since season's end, Kluber has mostly tuned out the game. He caught only snippets of the postseason (following the Royals' run, he says he felt mostly "jealousy, because we were so close to them"), and he won't throw again until mid-December. "I'm going to stick to the same schedule, keep the routine," he says. Kluber looks at his watch—it is nearing 4 p.m., which means the girls will be up soon from their naps and ready for bath time. "Got to enjoy these days as much as possible," he says. "Before we know it it'll be spring training." The weather has turned chilly, and you can feel it coming: fall turning into winter; Opening Day; the release of the Klubot 2.0. □



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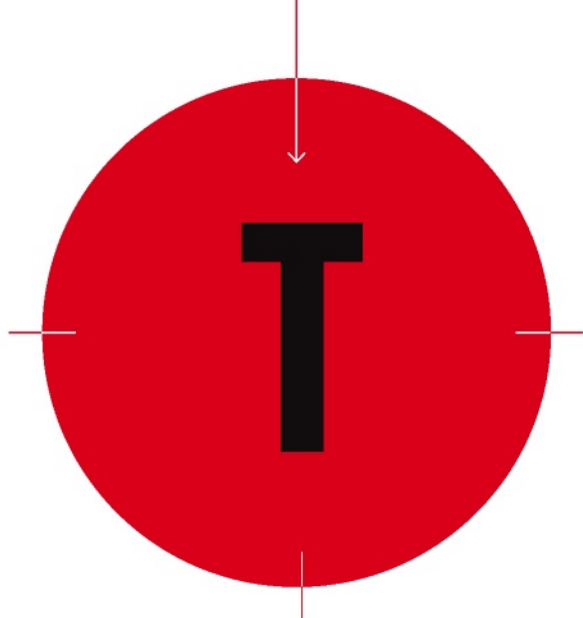
YOU CAN'T STAY ANGRY AT P.K. SUBBAN

Bold, but reckless. Brilliant, but exasperating. Big-game ready, but sometimes unfocused. The face of the Canadiens is all of that, not to mention one of the best defensemen in the NHL. And though he's still chasing his first Cup, the league's most demanding fans love him as the successor to the franchise's most hallowed ghosts

BY MICHAEL FARBER

Photograph by
John Huet
For Sports Illustrated





**"WHEN THEY
LIKE YOU IN
MONTREAL,"
SAYS SUBBAN'S
FATHER, "THEY
LIKE YOU A LOT."**

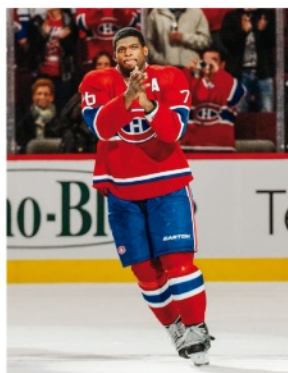
Tout le monde en parle is a talk show that bears only a passing resemblance to the familiar American genre. There is no opening monologue. There are no house bands or stupid human tricks. The program, which is televised on Sunday nights on Radio-Canada, the French version of the CBC, runs an exhausting two hours and 15 minutes. There is an amiable sidekick and a studio audience, but the viewing experience is otherwise as foreign as the language. Guy A. Lepage is the host. He can lob softball questions but will also unabashedly bring 95-mph heat. The show is among the most watched in French Canada, and its guests include politicians, celebrities and, on Oct. 5, three days before the NHL season, Canadiens defenseman P.K. Subban.

Wearing a white sports jacket, a midnight-blue shirt with matching tie and an earpiece through which he heard simultaneous English interpretations of the questions, Subban, flush with the richest contract in Montreal's 104-year history, stickhandled deftly. Asked about his booming shot, the 25-year-old, who hails from Toronto, replied in English, praising his teammates for screening goalies. When Lepage dredged up former Canadiens winger Alex Kovalev's recent comments that the blueliner was unworthy of his new eight-year, \$72 million deal, Subban graciously said that Kovalev was entitled to his opinion. Pressed about being the NHL's highest-paid defenseman, Subban responded by noting that a popular TV host probably has a sweet contract himself. Subban, one of Montreal's four newly minted alternate captains—this season the team has decided that nobody will wear the C—was ticking all the leadership boxes: humility, respect, poise. As the 17-minute interview wound down, Lepage asked Subban, who can be grating on the ice, how he unnerves opponents.

From his home—the show was taped on Oct. 2—Subban texted Mathieu Darche, a former teammate.

"Listen to this line coming up. Ha Ha."

Unlike most elite defensemen, Subban is not a calming blue-line presence. He colors outside the lines. At his worst, when his enthusiasm trumps his judgment, he might give both teams a good chance to win. At his best, he is unconventional and fearless. Now Subban saw his opening, a chance to win the interview. ("I was giving fans what they wanted," he explained three weeks later. "Things you wouldn't get in a regular interview.") Subban launched into a Science Guy discourse about how the protein



POINT PRODUCER

Subban's one-timers from the high slot are deadly—he tied for the lead in last year's playoffs with four power-play goals.

in his diet and the coffee he drinks before each game combine to produce gas, which he then emits in the vicinity of enemy goalies.

His calculatedly pungent remarks wafted across North America, all the way to St. Louis. "[Our coaches] were laughing, like, Did he really say that?" says Blues assistant coach Kirk Muller, who was a Canadiens assistant during Subban's rookie season in 2010–11. "[We'd] never heard anyone answer a question like that before. The only guy who would is P.K."

In the Bell Centre dressing room, accompanying a line from Ontario native John McCrae's World War I-era poem *In Flanders Fields*—TO YOU FROM FAILING HANDS WE THROW THE TORCH BE YOURS TO HOLD IT HIGH—are portraits of the 45 Canadiens players in the Hockey Hall of Fame. Subban sometimes scans the faces. "I don't know how many guys think they have an opportunity of being in that special group," he says. "I hope I do. That's my motivation." Subban pauses. He wants to make sure it sounds neither selfish nor boastful but right. "If I have that motivation, it can only help my team be successful."

Subban is at a corner table in a superb Japanese restaurant near downtown Montreal, a lunch reservation made by his personal assistant, his older sister Natasha. An 18-piece sashimi platter and three smartphones are arrayed before him. Being P.K. is never a bad thing, but it has also never been quite this good. In July he vacationed in Saint-Tropez. In August he signed his megadeal. In September, at the request of Spike Lee, Subban presented the director with an award at the Montreal International Black Film Festival. *60 Minutes*



P.K. SUBBAN

young and old, English and French. A young, tall brunette approached and said, “Let’s step up our selfie game,” and Subban obliged. As she left, she dropped a slip of paper on the table with her name, XOx, the imprint of a red-lipstick kiss and a telephone number. As Karl Subban, P.K.’s father, says, “When they like you in Montreal, they like you a lot.”

If you accept the Canadiens’ poetic inclinations, the time line of the franchise can be charted as a torch relay of hockey exceptionalism. Starting in 1942 the metaphoric flame has passed from Maurice Richard to Jean Béliveau (in ’53), to Guy Lafleur (in ’71) and finally to Patrick Roy (in ’85). Now after two mostly unexceptional decades (the Canadiens last won a Stanley Cup in ’93), Subban has stooped, retrieved the flickering light and illuminated the city. Without his ever having won a Cup, and with just a single Norris Trophy to his credit in four full NHL seasons—“half a trophy,” says Karl, noting that his son was voted the league’s best defenseman in the lockout-shortened 2012–13 season—Subban’s disproportionate popularity has made him the illogical successor to Quebec’s homegrown hockey gods, who won a combined 20 Cups and 16 major trophies in Montreal: the Rocket, Le Gros Bill, the Flower and Saint Patrick. Subban just happens to be a different color, speak a different language and hail from the rival city of Toronto.

Subban is not even the best of the Canadiens; goalie Carey Price is. But that is incredibly beside the point. This

is P.K.’s world, and everybody else is just feeding him for one-timers. He is a phenomenon, filling a void in a city that is reaching, or overreaching, for a hero. “The feedback [about Subban] from fans, through Twitter . . . it’s unbelievable,” says Geoff Molson, the Canadiens’ principal owner, whose family owned the team during parts of the Richard, Béliveau and Lafleur eras. In a city that venerates flair, Subban cuts across generational lines because he plays with a video-game edge that skews young while also rekindling soft-focus memories of the Canadiens’ dynasty teams that racked up style points as well as Stanley Cups.

When the city holds a mirror to its best self, it sees a grinning Pernel Karl Subban.

“When was the last time the fans had a player who played

is planning a story on Subban, despite the fact that, at least until the Canadiens win their 25th Stanley Cup, he is mostly famous for being famous.

Meanwhile Montreal leads the NHL and Subban has already scored one spectacular goal, a circle-the-net-and-dangle beauty during a 3–2 win over the Avalanche on Oct. 18. He also rocked the most fabulous costume at the team Halloween party—which he paid for and hosted—as a professional makeup artist transformed him into Michael Jackson (if Jackson had been 6 feet tall and a thick 217 pounds) from the “Thriller” video. As Subban attacked his sashimi, a line had already begun to form outside an electronics store three miles to the east, where he was scheduled to make a dinner-hour promotional appearance. There he met a steady stream of adoring fans,

"P.K. LIKES TO PUT AN ACCENT ON THINGS," SAYS WEAVER, "AN ACCENT *AIGU*."

with the same passion that they have for watching the game?" Subban wonders. "The fans see a player who understands what it means to wear the jersey. There's a difference between that and being a good hockey player. There've been games when they said P.K. didn't play his best, but there hasn't been a day they've booed me. People appreciate that I'm not scared to make a mistake. How many players have come through this organization and played scared? *I'm just happy not to make a mistake so I'm not noticed.*

"Me, on the other hand. . . ."

Like his adopted, principally French-speaking province, Subban is distinct. He's built like no other elite defenseman, starting with his powerful wrists and freakishly long fingers, which are both instrumental in his ability to hammer pucks on net even when they are not lying flat. Subban inherited his outsized hands from his 6' 3" father, who emigrated from Jamaica to the Ontario mining city of Sudbury at age 11 in 1970 and played basketball at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay. (The Subbans are an accomplished athletic family. P.K.'s mother, Maria, who was born in Monserrat and emigrated to Toronto when she was 11, also in '70, was a high school sprinter; his eldest sister, Nastassia, played basketball at York University in Toronto, and ended her career in 2004 having scored the third-most points in school history; younger brother Malcolm, a 20-year-old goalie, was the Bruins' first-round draft choice in 2012; and Jordan, a 19-year-old defenseman and the youngest of the five Subban children, was taken in the fourth round by the Canucks a year later.)

"That bomb from the point . . . P.K.'s almost like that [character] from *The Mighty Ducks*, Fulton Reed," says Subban's friend Montreal defenseman Mike Weaver. "The difference is P.K. can skate." Subban is agile on his blades, more power than elegance. He often removes one hand from his stick while puckhandling and uses the other hand to fend off checkers, a habit that used to make former general manager Pierre Gauthier crazy. Sometimes when Subban wheels with one hand on the stick, his other will almost brush the ice, like a short-track speedskater's. He practically invites contact in the corners. He will slow, absorb a hit, control the puck and spin away from forecheckers. Says Kovalev, "He just plays like we used to play on the street."

But Subban is at his most unorthodox when bodychecking. He often delivers hits backward, a maneuver that has been out of fashion in the NHL since journeyman defenseman Gilles Marotte did it in the 1970s. With crossover strides and a quick pivot, Subban will slam his back and rump into puck carriers. The checks are literally breathtaking because he usually catches his targets in the chest. In December 2010 he nailed Boston's Brad Marchand with a punishing backdoor

hit that left the Bruins' winger gasping. (During the Canadiens' home opener on Oct. 16, Marchand attempted a Bauer vasectomy on Subban, who crumpled to the ice when the stick speared his groin. Marchand received a slashing penalty while Subban was called for his scenery-chewing embellishment.)

Subban considers his checking style utilitarian, not flashy. "[If] you hit with your shoulder, that's a lot of force on an extremity," he says. "You don't want to go through a dislocated shoulder, labrum surgery, that garbage. Your butt and back are two of the strongest parts of your body." Subban has been a healthy scratch and missed the first six games of the 2012–13 season because of a contract dispute, but he has never missed a match because of injury.

Weaver says Subban took a shot off an ankle last season and the following day iced both ankles. "For like a month he was hobbling all over the room, making sure everybody saw it," Weaver says with a grin. "P.K. likes to put an accent on things—an accent *aigu*."

"All you have to do is watch our childhood videos," Subban says. "[It's] Malcolm's birthday and there I am, dancing in front of the camera. *Hey, look at me, look at me.* But for me it's not so much about the attention but the sense of accomplishment. I want to win a Cup. I want to be known as one of the best. Montreal's given me a great platform."

"He's a better player in Montreal than he would be in Nashville," Darche says. "The attention."

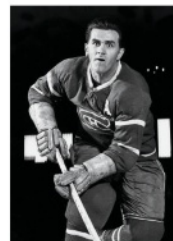
But many in the NHL take a dim view of what one Eastern Conference veteran calls Subban's "narcissism." In 2010, then Flyers captain Mike Richards excoriated Subban, saying, "He's a guy that's come to the league and hasn't earned respect. Hopefully someone on [his] team addresses it because . . . something might happen to him if he continues to be that cocky."

A laundry list of Subban solecisms includes:

- During timeouts he will skate in tight circles and stare down the opposing bench. ("The notion is tough guys challenge the bench and skill players never do," he says. "I'm considered a skilled player, but I don't carry myself like a skilled player.")

GALLIC GUSTO

Subban's spirited play recalls the stylish exploits of (below, from top) Richard, Béliveau, Lafleur and Roy.



DAVID BIER (RICHARD); DENIS BRODEUR/NHL/GETTY IMAGES (BÉLIEU); BRUCE BENNETT/STUDIOS/GETTY IMAGES (LAFLEUR); HEINZ KUTNER/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (ROY)



P.K. SUBBAN

With Montreal trailing the Flames 2–0 after the first period in Calgary on Oct. 9, 2013, Michel Therrien summoned Subban and defense partner Josh Gorges into his office. The coach, however, addressed only Subban.

Therrien: “Is this summer f----- hockey that I didn’t f----- know?”

Subban: “No.”

Therrien: “Is this a charity game?”

Subban stumbled through an answer before Therrien interjected, “Skate! Move the f----- puck. You’re not f----- there. I know you’re not there. I told the guys before the game, he’s not there. Just the way he practiced yesterday, he’s not going to be there. Same thing today.”

NHL coaches have colorfully chastised players during intermissions for roughly, well, forever, but this was different: TV cameras had captured the moment. More important, these were the Canadiens’ own cameras, shooting the club-produced *24CH* series, which airs on Canadian sports networks RDS and TSN. GM Marc Bergevin vets all content of the weekly behind-the-scenes show—this is state-sponsored media—and did not red-flag the reprimand, a decision widely interpreted as a subliminal message to Subban about his unreliability rather than simply a peek behind the closed door of nightly NHL life. Molson says that the team “probably learned from the experience it was a little too much reality TV.” Even more curious, Subban says that Bergevin cleared the snippet with him. “I didn’t want to be the guy who’d say you can or can’t air it,” Subban says. “It’s your show.”

On a Thursday in late October, Therrien is at his desk at Montreal’s suburban practice facility. Behind the bench, his expression fits neatly into that slot between mournful acceptance and pained stoicism. Now his broad face is merry, almost playful. “Let’s put it this way,” Therrien says, “I have more meetings with P.K. about teaching the game than [with] a lot of the guys. P.K. needs to be pushed at times. We all know we have a special player. And I have a vision for him. I told him he has the potential to be one of the top D in the league, both ways. We’re going to work to that.”

Therrien, who had previously coached the Canadiens from 2000 to ’03 before coaching the Penguins from ’05 to ’09, returned to Montreal in June ’12 after scouting and working as an analyst for RDS. In one of his first meetings with the team’s veterans, he told them that he, not they, would monitor Subban. In February 2013, when Subban reported to a muted reception from his teammates after having missed the first two weeks of the truncated season because of a contract dispute, the coach told him the same thing. The previous season there had been “turmoil,” in Bergevin’s words, throughout the organization, and Subban was bobbing in the roiling waters. In ’11–12 he had fought seven times—three times in games and four in practices, scuffling with teammates Darche, David Desharnais, Louis Leblanc and Tomas Plekanec.

For Subban’s veteran teammates, including current Stars winger Erik Cole, the root issues were his lack of “consistency” and

- He joins postwhistle scrums as a peripheral figure. (“My team needs me on the ice,” he says. “Even a trade-off of me and [Boston winger Milan] Lucic might not be fair for my team.”)
- When challenged after his seismic checks, he rarely fights; he’s had only 12 NHL bouts. (“I drop the gloves once in a while,” he says.)

- His goal celebrations, which might include a Usain Bolt pose or CH logo popping, are excessive.

“There’s a swagger to him that annoys some guys, the way he carries himself on the ice,” Marchand says. “They see it as arrogance. But then all good players have some of that.”

Subban certainly knows how to make an entrance. When the Canadiens took him in the second round in 2007—he was the 17th defenseman selected—Subban approached the draft table, shook hands all around and said, “You guys made the right choice.” In his first NHL game, a 3–2 loss in Philadelphia in February ’10, Subban challenged towering Flyers defenseman Chris Pronger, perhaps the nastiest player of his generation, during a scrum at the end of the third period. “He’s got one guy in one hand and one guy in another,” Subban says. “I come right in the middle, grab him and say, ‘Let him go, let him go.’ And he didn’t say anything. I say, ‘I’m not scared of you.’ He says, ‘God, your breath stinks. Can you get out of here?’ ”

Subban takes a swig of sparkling water and continues the story. “Next night we’re playing them in Montreal. The puck gets rimmed out of the zone on a power play, and I’m in front of the Philly bench. I stop just before the red line, getting ready to rim it back around after our forwards tag up. As I’m winding up I look over, and the player coming out of the [penalty] box is Pronger. All I see coming over my shoulder is orange. He’s coming to kill me. So I follow through with my shot and as I recoil, I kinda duck down over my right shoulder and slip out of a check as he starts to throw it. He trips over my back leg and falls into the boards face-first. As I’m backing away, I see [Flyers wing] Ian Laperrière, and he’s got a funny face, like, *Oh, my God*. And I’m laughing and Pronger’s yelling, ‘You bailed! You bailed!’ If you can believe, the words out of my mouth were ‘Suck it, Prongs.’ ”

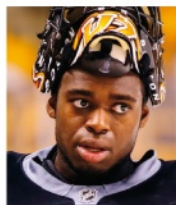
"THERE'S A SWAGGER TO HIM THAT ANNOYS GUYS," SAYS MARCHAND. "THEY SEE IT AS ARROGANCE."

"professionalism," code for punctuality in the clockwork world of professional sports. "There was a stretch where he was great on the ice and almost gave off a [vibe that] he didn't care off it," says Cole, who was hard on Subban. "There was a home game [in 2011–12]. A Saturday. He came in at 9:45, walked in pretty casual, like, *What's going on?* It's halfway through the year, bud. We always have 9:30 meetings. That morning some of the vets let [interim coach Randy Cunneynworth] know they'd appreciate something in the way of discipline. Not the first time it'd happened. He'd had a couple of free passes. Cunney said to just focus on the game. It made a lot of guys feel like P.K. could do no wrong. That can create an imbalance in the locker room."

Therrien indeed has handled Subban himself, starting with banning the triple-low-five that the defenseman and Price did after victories, a move mimicked in every schoolyard and rink in the city. On occasion the coach has told Subban that he might be better suited to play forward, not exactly a compliment for a Norris Trophy winner. Before the Sochi Olympics, Therrien initially declined to stump for his player's inclusion on Team Canada, saying, "It's not for me to say. I'm in charge of the Montreal Canadiens." (Passive, meet aggressive.) Therrien eventually offered belated support, saying, "When I felt he was playing both sides of the ice, I got his back." Subban made the team as Canada's eighth defenseman, skating 11:41 in a 6–0 rout of Austria, his only game of the tournament. "I thought it was a great growing experience for P.K.," Team Canada coach Mike Babcock says. "He handled himself with so much class. Great teammate. Positive. Energetic. Trained hard every day."

Subban finished 2013–14 with 10 goals and 53 points in 82 games, which was down from the 11 goals and 38 points in 42 games that he had when he won the Norris the season before. He was also –4 after being +12 in '12–13. Still, in relative Corsi, an analytic that attempts to measure the effectiveness of a player in driving possession relative to his teammates, Subban ranked 11th among NHL defensemen, an indication that his season was not entirely bleak. "It just seemed there was always something going on," Subban says. "Always something about P.K. Always negatives. It's a miracle I played as well as I played. I mean the playoffs were me saying enough's enough."

In the second-round series against the Bruins—after chipping in five assists in a Round 1 sweep of the Lightning—Subban had some of his grandest moments, on and off the ice. Game 1 in Boston opened with Karl buying a CANADIEN DIVE TEAM T-shirt adorned with Subban's number 76 outside TD Garden and then mingling with delighted fans, and ended with his son's power-play winner (his second goal of the night) in the fifth minute of double overtime. In the hours that followed, Twitter exploded with racist comments. Two days later, after



BLOOD ON THE ICE

Subban's younger brothers are NHL prospects: Malcolm (above, left) was the Bruins' first-round pick in 2012, and Jordan was a Canucks fourth-rounder in '13.

a 5–3 Game 2 loss, Subban faced questions about the social media eruption. In words that were extraordinarily wise for a player who had always been skewered for immaturity, Subban absolved the Bruins' organization, the city of Boston and the NHL,

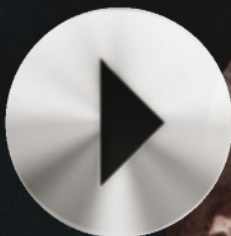
and he praised the Hub's passionate fans. This was a Gallic shrug from the illogical successor to the Flying Frenchmen. He had defused the situation. He had skated past the noise.

In the last minute of the Bruins' 4–2 win in Game 5, moments after Subban had closed the scoring with a power-play goal—a one-timer from the high slot—enforcer Shawn Thornton squirted a water bottle in Subban's face as he lugged the puck past the Boston bench. (Thornton was fined \$2,820.52.) "From a Boston perspective, I'll say he's a dynamic player, agitating, very effective," says Thornton, now with the Panthers. "His antics are a little bit exaggerated. I'll also say he was the best player in the series." Therrien agrees; Subban scored four goals and had three assists in the second round. "When it's time to play big games, he plays big games," says the coach. "Him and Price were our best players." Montreal beat the Bruins 3–1 in Game 7 in Boston. For the Canadiens, it was almost as satisfying as winning the Stanley Cup.

"Racist tweets, booed in Boston, all the Bruins players wanted to kill him," Darche says. "A lot of guys would crumble under that pressure. But for P.K., it's just fuel."

Subban also has this in common with the Canadiens' other torchbearers: The relationship between the team and its most popular player hasn't been all lollipops and rainbows. GM Tommy Gorman wanted to trade Richard early in his career because Gorman considered the Rocket injury-prone. By 1984, coach Jacques Lemaire had no use for an aging Lafleur, the right wing on Lemaire's line in the late '70s, hastening Lafleur's departure from Montreal and subsequent dotage seasons with the Rangers and the Nordiques. In December '95, Roy demanded a trade mid-game when he was left in goal by coach

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"PEOPLE APPRECIATE THAT I'M NOT SCARED TO MAKE A MISTAKE," SAYS SUBBAN.

Mario Tremblay during a blowout; he was obliged days later.

In Subban's case, contract negotiations have been civic psychodramas. Although he wanted to sign long-term in 2012, he ultimately accepted a two-year "bridge deal" worth \$5.75 million that expired last spring. A restricted free agent this past summer, Subban had wanted to re-up with a deal for the eight-year maximum, but in-season negotiations between his agent, Don Meehan, and Bergevin faltered. On July 5, Subban filed for arbitration, along with 19 other NHL players.

His was the only one of those that actually was heard. In every other instance, players and teams were able to come to terms before they had to sit down together.

Subban insisted on attending the Aug. 1 hearing because he wanted to hear every word, all the team's criticisms and cavils—the eighth-best defenseman in Canada, a minus player, whatever. Arbitration hearings are unpleasant, but Subban recognized them for exactly what they are: business. He exited the room grim-faced but later conceded to a friend that he thought the Canadiens' critique could have been even worse.

The game of contract chicken went into overtime. The collective bargaining agreement allows for a 48-hour negotiating window following arbitration hearings. If Montreal and Subban could not reach a deal, he would play for one year at the arbitrator's number, presumably face the same dance next summer and then be eligible for unrestricted free agency in 2016. Of course by then he might have been gone—Bergevin likely would have made a preemptive trade before Subban had a chance to walk. The clock was ticking on Subban's Montreal love affair.

Moments after the hearing, Molson contacted Subban. They spoke that night. Within 24 hours Subban had signed—for the maximum eight years—a deal that exceeded the annual average value of those of star defensemen Zdeno Chara, Drew Doughty, Duncan Keith and Shea Weber. "We wanted to get it done," Molson says, "and a big effort was made in order to get it done."

Did he overrule his GM?

"I would never do that."

Says Subban, "I spoke to Geoff on that day and before the arbitration process, and he made it clear to me that I'd be a Montreal Canadien for a very long time. He told me that, and he was a man of his word."

Seventy-five seconds left in regulation at the Bell Centre on Oct. 21 in a 1–1 game. The Red Wings' Drew Miller carries the puck down the left boards, one-on-one against the Canadiens' right defenseman. The smart play for Subban, the safe play, is to stand up, impede Miller and force a dump-in, but Subban chooses to line up Miller for a hip-check instead. Timing



ROOF RAISER

Montreal made Subban the highest-paid blueliner in the game this summer. All the team expects in return? A 25th Stanley Cup.

off, skates angled to the boards, Subban misses, and Miller slithers past, throwing the puck into the slot, creating a glorious game-winning scoring chance that Detroit does not cash.

Back on the Montreal bench, Subban beckons J.J. Daigneault, who coaches the Canadiens' defensemen. Subban asks, "Why do I keep doing that?"

Instead of obliging with a blistering evaluation of Subban's blunder, Daigneault merely taps him on the shoulder, a sweet gesture of absolution.

And that is the ineluctable truth about the marvelous and occasionally maddening P.K.: Montreal cannot stay angry at him. In the first minute of overtime, Subban's laser from the point caroms off of Red Wings goalie Jimmy Howard and, eventually on a rebound, to the stick of Desharnais, who backhands home the winner.

Subban has a worrisome 12 minors through 19 games, tied for third most in the NHL, including five in the offensive zone and two that negated power plays—and he has not been as effective getting pucks from the point through the thicket of penalty killers, one reason the Canadiens' power play ranks 27th in the league. But the dynamic elements of his game and the honor of his intentions always seem to win out. Subban had two poor games in early November, echoes of a 7–1 loss in Tampa Bay on Oct. 13 in which he took a soft interference penalty that led directly to a power-play goal and, when he was caught out on a long shift, was beaten wide by winger Ryan Callahan, who scored. After the game, in which Tampa star Steven Stamkos had a hat trick, Subban told the media, "Obviously he scored some goals out there tonight. We know he can do that. Our team, when we're playing well—i.e., in the playoffs last year when we faced them—[is] a lot better than we were tonight. . . . I'd tell Steven to enjoy it because next time it's not going to happen."

Question: What hockey player actually would use the expression "i.e." in conversation?

Answer: The same highbrow, lowbrow, bold and exasperating player who would go on a popular talk show and talk about gut-check time. □

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→ BY LEE JENKINS



LAST THURSDAY NIGHT

at UCLA, several college football players again violated rules of civility. “I was trying so hard not to make a mistake,” explained defensive lineman Matt Dickerson, “but I did butter my whole bread roll instead of tearing off a piece and just buttering that.”

“There were a couple of times I brought my face to my food when I should have brought my food to my face,” admitted defensive back Jaleel Wadood. “I like bringing my face to my food.”

“I had to go to the bathroom and I left my napkin on my seat,” confided linebacker Kenny Young. “I know I was supposed to leave it on the table.” Impropropriety on campus continues. “I’m going to work on this,” Young added. “It was just my first etiquette dinner.”

Forget bonfires and pep rallies. Nothing screams rivalry week like 15-piece table settings, and before some UCLA players could master the game plan for USC this week, they had to study the proper placement of the charger plate—not to mention the mystic purpose of the charger plate. “My mom taught me a lot about manners,” Dickerson said, “but I totally blanked on where the soup bowl goes.” Dickerson redeemed himself, however, with stellar salad-fork positioning.

Welcome to UCLA football’s eighth annual Etiquette Dinner: bow ties on, cellphones off, salt and pepper passed from left to right and in tandem. “I just thought if you wanted some salt, you asked for some salt,” said defensive lineman Takkarist McKinley. The evening, which is attended by freshmen and transfer players, kicks off with an hourlong crash course in decorum conducted by associate athletic director Ashley Armstrong and colleague Ric Coy. They break down everything from firm handshake mechanics to disciplined cologne application to efficient napkin dabbing, using a projector not unlike coach Jim Mora’s. Some of the instructions are basic (stand when greeting a guest), others advanced (when eating soup, guide the spoon away from your body as you scoop).

Players then apply what they’ve learned over a four-course white-tablecloth dinner with prominent faculty and alumni. “Let’s not stab the cherry tomatoes and croutons,” cautions Armstrong. “That’s a scene waiting to happen.” Legends are made here (quarterback Brett Hundley is still remembered for the resplendent three-piece suit he rocked three years ago), and so are examples (former defensive tackle Brian Price famously tucked his napkin into his collar). “If you need a bib,” Coy advises, “you should probably order a different meal.”

UCLA
players are
coached in
good
manners
as well as
in good
football.
First lesson:
“If you need
a bib,
you should
probably
order a
different
meal.”



How else
do teams
prepare
college
athletes for
real life?

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Who says gentility is gone from college football? At Table 3 defensive back Ron Robinson carefully stows a discarded sugar packet under his saucer. Offensive lineman Kolton Miller politely requests a moment to chew when asked a question midbite. Wide receiver Austin Roberts pauses with a carafe of balsamic vinaigrette before sending it counterclockwise around the table. Conversation topics range from house-friendly pets to critically acclaimed films. No one mentions the A-gap. “USC is playing Cal right now,” Robinson notes. He resists the burning temptation to check the score on his phone.

UCLA has 750 penalty yards this season, 12th most in the FBS, but Pac-12 referees might have a different perspective if they dined with the team. After soup and salad, chicken and pasta, cheesecake and strawberries, the refined members of Table 3 rise to mingle. Used utensils are lined up on their plates in precise parallel formation. If only Peggy Post were on the playoff committee, the 8–2 Bruins might have a decent shot.

These lessons resonate long after rivalry week. “You need it the first time you go to dinner with your girlfriend’s family,” says sophomore receiver Thomas Duarte. “And you need it every time you go to lunch for a job interview,” adds former linebacker Reggie Carter. Outside the Athletics Hall of Fame, the Bruin Bear statue is boarded up, having been spray-painted by uncouth USC fans. The UCLA diners are left to lament the loss of courtesy in college football.

There is only one appropriate way to defend the proud bear’s honor: Carve up the Trojans with butter knives. □



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